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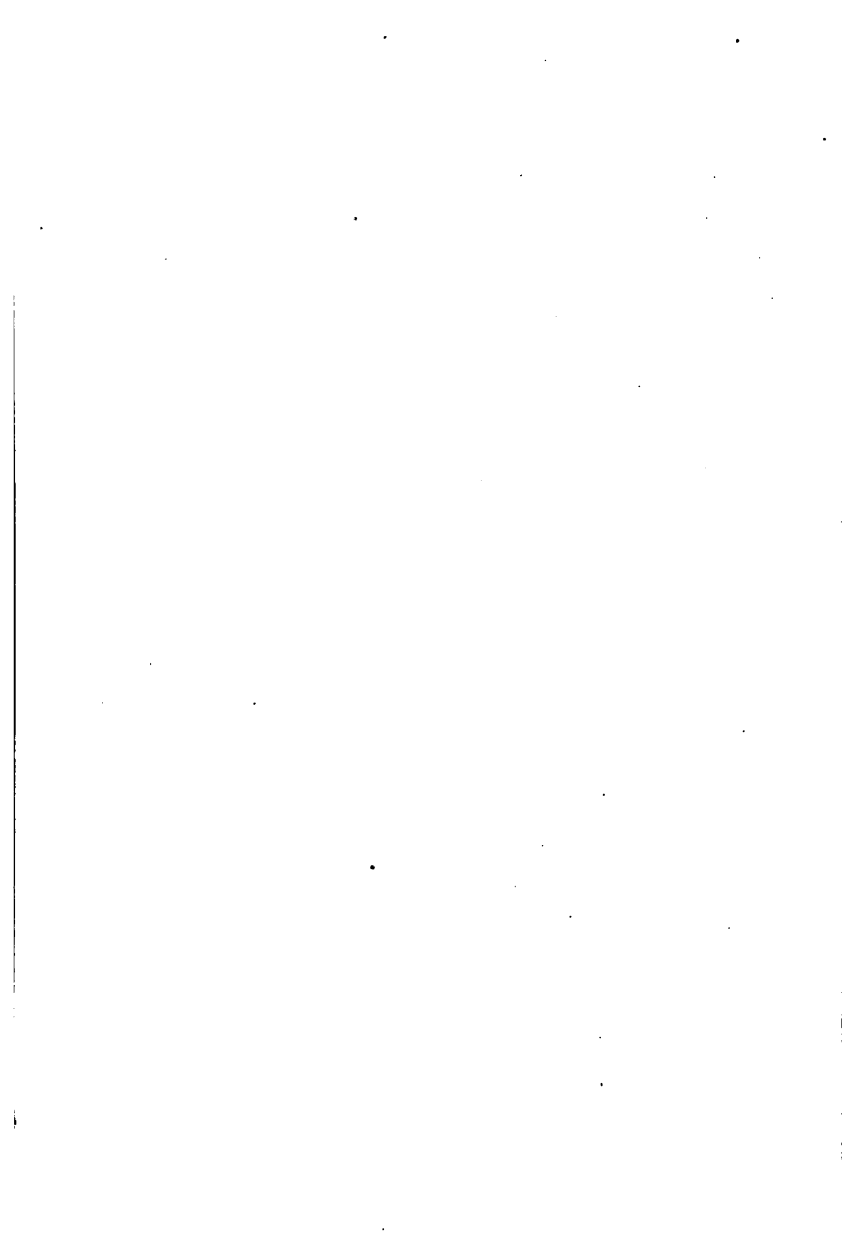
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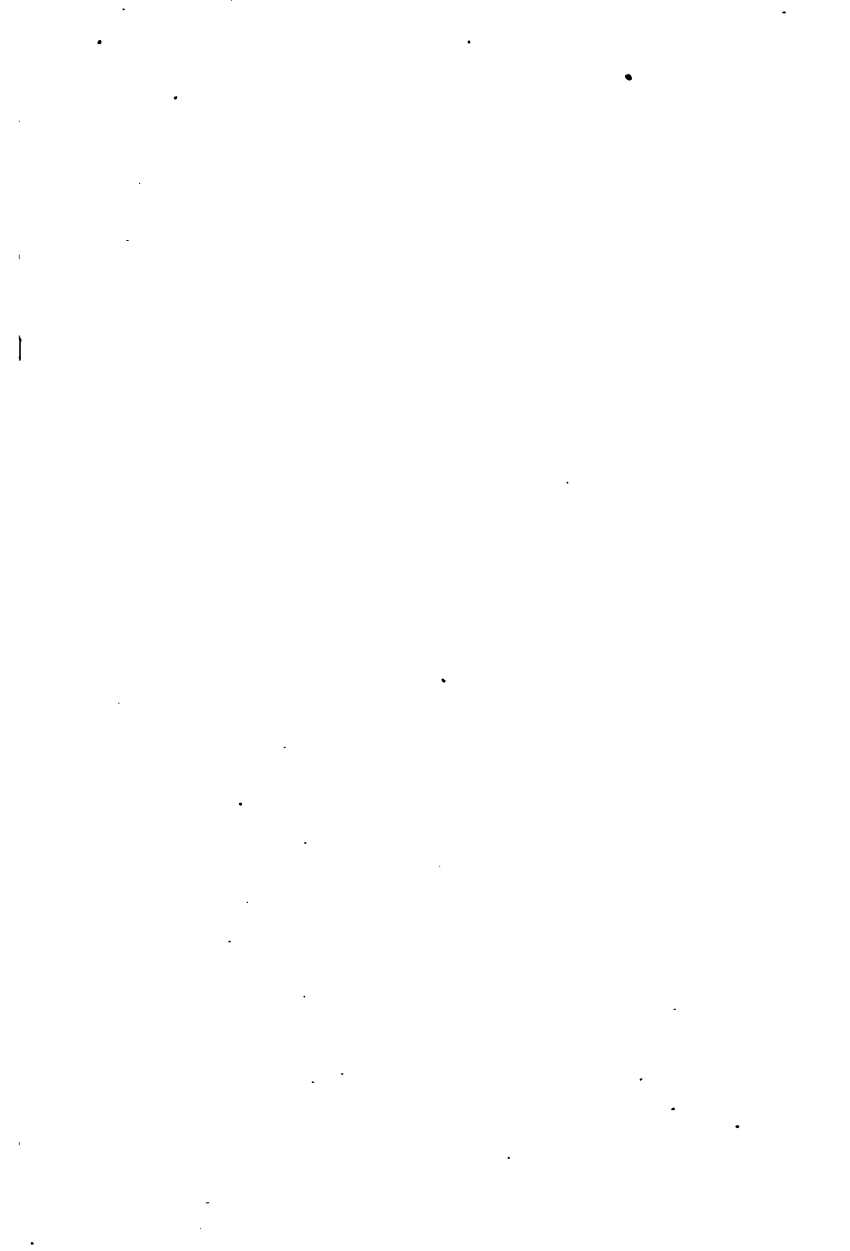
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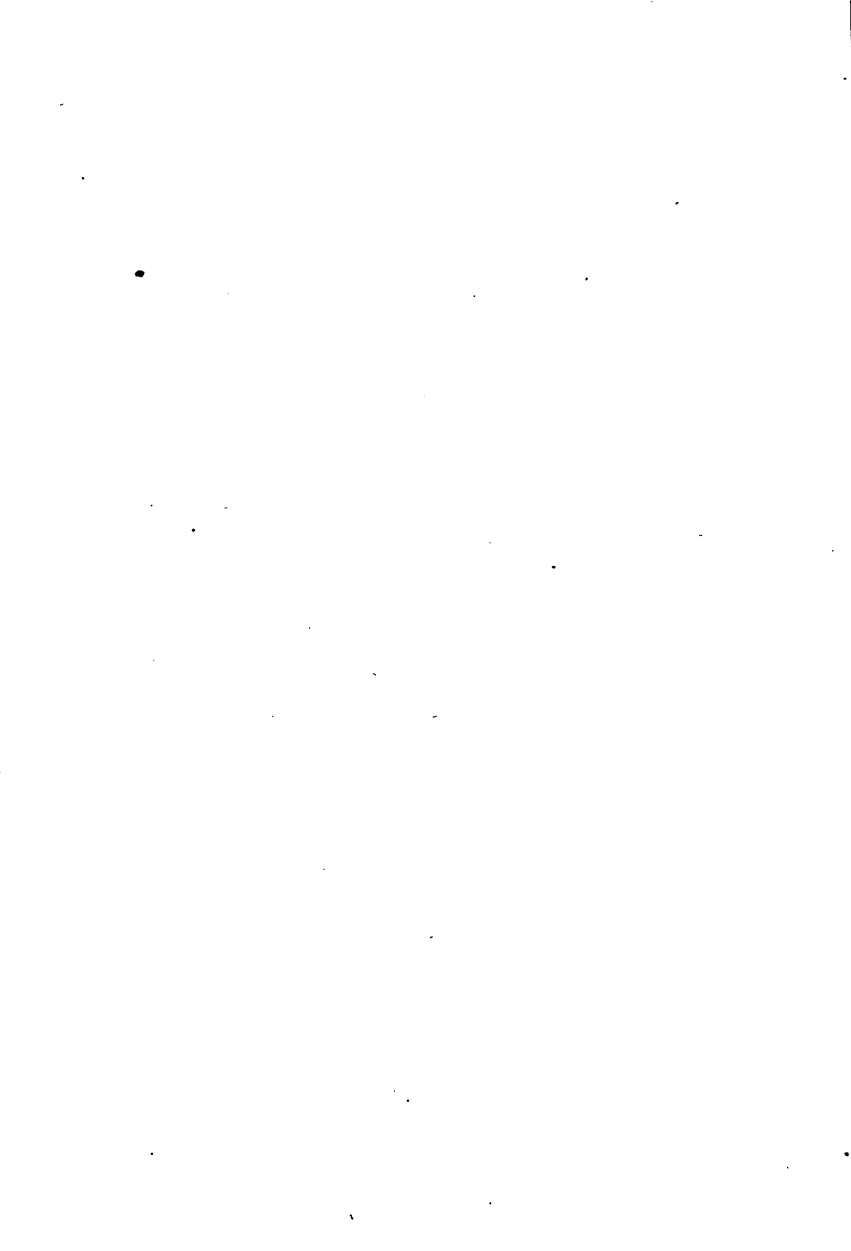
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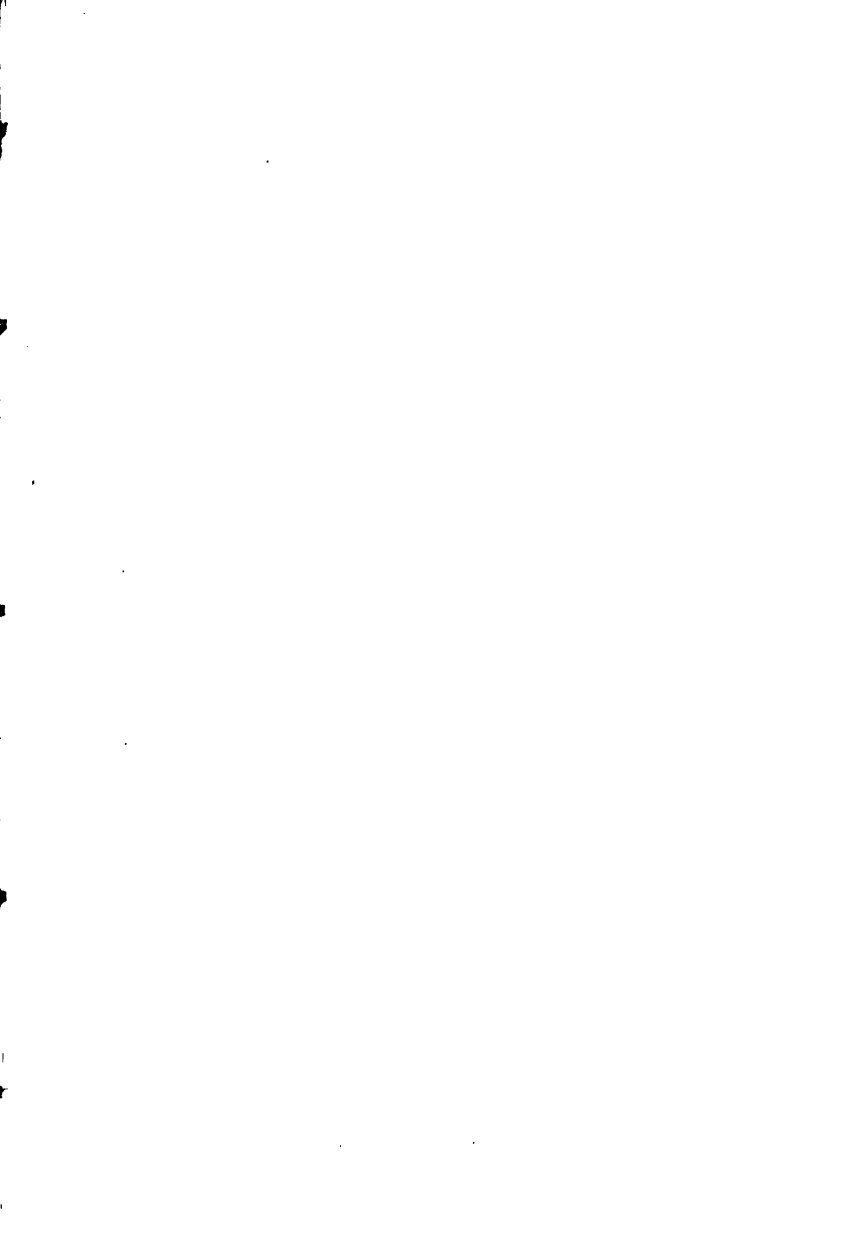






A VERY YOUNG COUPLE.







GEORGIE'S CALCULATIONS.

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A VERY YOUNG COUPLE.

BY THE AUTHOR OF
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A VERY YOUNG COUPLE.

CHAPTER I.

OUR FIRST EVENING.

IT certainly *was* an exceedingly small lodging. When my husband brought me up the narrow staircase I looked about me in some dismay, and when we entered the sitting-room I could not help saying, "Why, this is not *really* the drawing-room?"

"Why not?" asked he.

"Because there is not room to turn round in it," replied I, laughing.

Upon which he instantly went into a tiny space between the table and the door, and ran round and round there with about as much room to do so as a dog takes in those mysterious circles it paces out before it lies down.

"There!" he cried, triumphantly.

"I spoke metaphorically," replied I, with an air of grave rebuke.

"Meta how much?" said my husband, and then he threw his arms about my waist and began waltzing round the table, pioneering with such skill that he did not once come to grief against anything, though there was never more than half an inch between us and some article of furniture, or the wall. He *is* the best waltzer in the world; and, as we went whirling round and round, I thought of the first time I ever met him, and how I threw over Captain Villiers in order to dance with *him*, and had to keep hiding behind people all the rest of the evening to prevent the irate captain from accosting me, and accusing me of my sin. Ah, how little I thought then!

We only stopped for want of breath, and Fred skilfully deposited me in the apology for an easy chair that stood beside the fireplace—a high-backed, hideous, great creature, covered up from head to foot, arms and all, in brown Holland petticoats, evidently ashamed of itself, and, I am sure, with good cause.

How hungry I was after our journey!

"Are we to dine?" asked I, "or are we too poor to have dinners?" and I made the little face at him that he liked the best of all my faces.

"I ordered the dinner to-day," replied my husband; "the last time, ma'am, that I shall take that liberty in your house; a gala dinner, ma'am, to inaugurate our arrival at home."

"Is the dining-room down-stairs?"

"Set her up with dining-rooms!" cried Fred. "What will she want next, I wonder? A picture-gallery or a private chapel, I suppose. This, ma'am, is dining and drawing-room, all in one."

I was very much astonished.

"Are we to live and dine in the same room?" I asked, opening my eyes wide.

"Would you rather die and dine in it?" said he.

"Oh, but really—what shall we do while she's laying the things? —and—won't it smell?"

"We shall remain quietly seated in our chairs, pursuing our respective occupations; and, if it smells, we shall open the window for a few minutes after we have done eating."

"It seems very odd!" I replied, doubtfully. "I wonder how we shall like it?"

"Of all things, when we get accustomed to it," replied my husband, quickly.

"And do I sleep here, too?" asked I, meekly.

He opened a second door in the room, and led the way into a tolerably comfortable bed-room, with a dressing-closet beyond it.

I looked about me, wondering what I should do with my clothes, but I did not like to say anything, for fear he should think I was complaining.

"Well," said he, "will it do?"

"Oh, yes," I replied, rather slowly, "it will *do*. There are a few things, but we can get them easily: a hanging press for my dresses, you know; and, oh, Fred, there are no candles on the dressing-table, and no sofa, but it will be easy enough to get any little things we want. There's no hurry, and buying is *always* pleasant."

"I'll run you up some hooks for your dresses in no time; and, as for a sofa—well, you will hardly want one in here, you know, with the drawing-room so close at hand."

"Ah, perhaps not," said I, looking rather dismally about me as I threw my cloak and hat on the bed.

When we returned to the apartment, which I determined to call the parlor, as it was to be a sitting-room, answering all purposes in one, the servant—a big, raw-boned woman, who decidedly frightened me—had finished laying the table, and we sat down to our “gala dinner,” which consisted of a roast chicken, without either sauce or gravy, a piece of boiled fat, supposed to be bacon, garnished with greens, and some rather wet mashed potatoes. Being extremely hungry, we ate up the whole dinner, with the exception of a small part of the bacon. So then I began to chaff Fred.

“Oh, you capital housekeeper!” I cried. “Why, there’s not only no choice, but there is actually and truly not enough! You ought to have ordered a second dish; and pray, sir, did you quite forget the soup?” and then I added, timidly, to the servant—for though I could brow-beat my own husband, I was in great awe of Mrs. Crumpledum’s maid—“Bring the pudding, please.”

Martha stared, first with contempt at me, and then with appeal to Fred.

"There bain't none," she said, with a sharpness that made me start.

"Oh, very well," I said hurriedly, "it's not of the least consequence ;" and then, as she walked out of the room, dinner tray in hand, I cried, mockingly, to my husband—"Oh, Fred, no pudding—*what* a dinner !"

"Well, Georgy, do you know," replied Fred, "I'm not at all sure that Mrs. Crumpledum could *make* a pudding."

"Not make a pudding !" cried I, all amazement.

"No ; and, *if* she could, I'm not at all sure that we could afford puddings."

"Not afford puddings ! Good gracious, Fred ! what *can* you mean ? What do you think puddings are made of—gold ?"

"I think they are made of rice," answered he, "and apples—no, that's pies ; but—suet—yes, suet—and of—of—*other* things : and I think—let me see—suet, and rice, and other things—*many* other things ; yes, spice and sugar. Puddings take a deal of sugar ; now I must beg leave to inform you that all these things of which puddings are made cost money, my dear Mrs. Clare."

“ And it is your opinion, my dear Mr. Clare, that chickens, and bacon, and potatoes are things that do *not* cost money ?” and I pointed gayly at him, and laughed.

Mr. Clare cleared his throat.

“ Hem !—ahem ! There are necessities of life, and there are luxuries—superfluities—my dear madam.”

“ And you call a pudding a superfluity ?”

“ Most undoubtedly I do.”

“ A pudding ! Oh, Fred, Fred ! Why, who ever dined without a pudding ? If it had been a soufflet, or a shape of jelly or cream—now, they *are* a little troublesome to make, and cost something, if you don’t keep cows ; but a pudding ! Dear me, what an ignorant boy you are ! How much I *shall* have to teach you !”

“ I don’t think there would be room to keep a cow in this lodging, dear,” replied my husband, looking very seriously from side to side, as if meditating where she might be put—“ except, perhaps, if you insist upon it, in my dressing-room.”

“ Then,” I replied, laughing, “ we can’t, I am quite aware, afford any dishes that require much

cream ; but lots of puddings and pies can be made without *that*, my dear Fred."

"Now, for instance," said Fred, thoughtfully, "how would you make *custard*?"

"Custard?" cried I. "Well, I'm not quite sure about *custard*. I can't remember ever hearing much about *that*. I rather think you buy it—in shops, you know—and somehow melt it down."

"Oh ! ah !" said my husband, apparently satisfied ; "and how about eggs, Georgy ? For instance, now, how would you poach an egg ?"

"Oh, well," said I, "nothing can be easier than *that*. To boil eggs, you do it in their shells all round ; but, to poach them, you must take them out of their shells, and flatten them well before you boil them. One can tell *that* without being taught."

"Oh, is that the way?" said Fred, dryly. "I'm very glad to know. And how would you make soup, Georgy ?"

"I'd pour water on meat, of course, and let it stand till it's made, and then pour it off again, and shake it up well. Did you really not know *that*, you silly fellow ?"

"Well, my love, if all other trades fail, you shall certainly turn cook."

"I believe I've a taste for it," replied I, thoughtfully, "and I should like it well enough, if meat wasn't raw, and there were no fires."

"If meat was born cooked, there would not be so much occasion for cooks," replied my husband, sententially.

"I wonder," said I, "whether there's time to take a walk this evening before it gets quite dark? It looks pleasant, and I'm all anxiety to make acquaintance with the place."

We had only been married three months, and, of course, my word was law; so out we went. Those three months had been spent on the Continent. A rich uncle of Fred's had given him a fifty pound note to be expended on a honeymoon tour, and never did fifty pounds purchase days of sweeter enchantment than fell to our share. After that delicious tour was over, we paid visits, almost as delightful, at the houses of various friends. The honeymoon halo had glittered round us all this time, and it was only to-day that we were beginning life in real earnest.

Our marriage was what is called an imprudent one, but we were so very much in love that we would not listen to a word that was said to us. Fred's father is a country clergyman of respectable family, with a good living, and twelve children. Fred is the eldest son. In his cradle it was determined that he should be a parson like his father, and his whole education was given with that view and to that end. He had done very well at college, where he passed good examinations, and took fairly high honors, and where he also lived in a pleasant gentlemanly set, and enjoyed life so extremely that at the end of his college career he felt conscientious scruples about becoming a clergyman. He had a high ideal of what a clergyman's life should be, and did not feel any inclination to carry out this ideal in his own.

The time that followed his announcement of his intention not to take orders was horribly trying and disagreeable. His father was disappointed, and, instead of bearing the disappointment nicely, was unreasonably angry. He grumbled that so much money had been spent in vain,

as he chose to call it. The idea of grudging Fred the education of a gentleman because he did not wish to be a parson ! But this was not all. The foolish, misguided old man did worse than that. He actually suspected that Fred had not been behaving well, and that his having led a bad life was what led to his change of inclinations. Poor, dear Fred ! because he was merry and wished to enjoy himself, this tiresome old creature thought he must be wicked. Clergymen and old people are so narrow and so suspicious ; and Fred declares he believes his father was quite disappointed when he found that even the authorities had nothing worse to say of him than that he was a little idle !

So, for some time Fred was in dire disgrace, and regarded as a black sheep ; but, when I heard the story, I admired him with my whole heart, both for his scruples and for the noble heroism with which he adhered to his determination, notwithstanding all the low things his father said to him. It's not such an easy thing to resist an elderly clergyman if he is very angry, indeed, with you. My dear Fred is one of the best and

one of the most delightful men on earth ; but he is *not* suited to be a clergyman, and I love him all the better because he is *not*.

It was just then that he fell in love with me. We met while I was paying a visit at Colonel Milman's, and Fred came to the great ball there, and remained afterwards. He fell in love with me the first minute he saw me, which I do think is the most delightful thing that can possibly happen to a girl : you feel so sure then that it is *real* love. It *is* so much nicer than when the affection grows gradually and by degrees, and people become what is called "very much attached." Very much attached ! Of all phrases, I hate that the most. I'm sure old Mr. Clare was very much attached to *his* wife. I will venture to affirm that he never fell in love with her the first minute he saw her. Nothing on the face of the earth would have induced *me* to marry a man who told me he was very much attached to me ; but, so far from telling me *that*, Fred declared he loved me with all his heart and soul, and that he could not live without me ; and so we were engaged to be married at the end of a week's acquaintance.

It is such nonsense saying you can't know much of a person in a week. You can, of some people, in a day or in an hour. I knew Fred better at the end of that first ball (I danced several round dances with him, sat out three quadrilles, and he took me down to supper) than I know the Bishop of L—— now, who christened me, and with whom I have been acquainted all my life. But then, I never waltzed with his Lordship, and he never made me laugh so much that I actually *could* not stand, and had to sit down on the stairs from mere weakness, and I never sat out a quadrille with the Bishop in a window seat, as I did with Fred—not that I would sit in a window seat with a partner generally, for I am not a flirt, and I don't approve of it, but I had a feeling about Fred from the beginning, though I never, *never*, NEVER should have been in love with him if he had not been in love with me first. Still, I had a *feeling* about him somehow. Perhaps it was his love for me, though I did not guess it or think about it, that gave me, unconsciously to myself, this sort of a feeling.

When we were engaged, we knew quite well it must be a long engagement ; so we agreed that

we would wait years and years, and be faithful and true, and then marry at last. Fred had nothing, and, though I have fifty pounds a year, he said we could not marry on *that*; besides which, he declared (Fred is so noble) that he never would marry to be supported by his wife; so he had to choose a profession, and after that to make an income by it, before we could dream of marrying. I told him I did not think he need hurry himself, for being engaged was quite delicious enough to satisfy anybody; but somehow or other Fred did not seem to see that.

Then, all of a sudden, a delightful friend got him this clerkship in a bank at Lynsford. A hundred and twenty pounds a year! and my fifty! Why, it seemed like riches, only Fred said it was not—that it was only a modest competence, and I should find we were poor people, but still that it was enough to marry on, and that, as we loved each other, we should be happier than kings and queens who don't. Dear Fred! he knows much more about being poor and having to manage than I do, because of his father being a clergyman with such a large family. Now, I am an only

child, and my father is a colonel in India. I have been brought up at a fashionable school, spent my holidays with rich friends, and have fifty pounds a year for pocket-money, which Aunt Letitia left me ; so I have not the least idea how to live in a small way, but I expect it to be uncommonly pleasant, and I'm sure it will be soon learnt. It is so very easy to spend money, that it certainly ought to be easier still, *not* to spend it.

Well, as soon as he had got this charming clerkship, Fred said that there *could* be no reason in the world why he should wait any longer. His father, of course, made himself as disagreeable as possible about it ; but what can fathers do if sons are determined ? and Fred was so good-natured and so reasonable that old Mr. Clare had to give in, and I think he must have felt so ashamed of himself. Two of Fred's sisters came to the wedding, and were bridesmaids—Polly and Pincher, as they are called in the family, and they are very pretty (especially Pincher), and extremely nice. Aunt Dorothy wrote to papa in India for his consent ; but we could not wait for it, because papa is always “up the country,” and it is always

months and months before he answers a letter ; but Aunt Dorothy is very soft-hearted and good-natured, and seemed to like the whole thing almost as much as we did ; and so we were married from her house, and, after all, our long engagement lasted only two months.

CHAPTER II.

MY FIRST MARKETING.

WE took such a charming walk ! The place is really lovely. Our lodging is in a little row of houses facing the river, and further down is a very handsome old bridge. On the other side of the water are fields, and lanes, and woods, and everything that anybody can wish for, and all this within six or seven minutes' walk of our front door. The town is situated on a very steep hill, and the principal street runs abruptly down to the river, about as far above our house as the bridge is below it. I certainly think all towns ought to be built on *very* steep hills—not, of course, upon mountains : it would be wicked to spoil mountains by building towns on them ; but it is a good use to make of a steep hill, and it is the only way by which a town can be made really

pretty and picturesque. As to Lynsford, it seems to me to be the prettiest place in the world, and Fred says just the same.

When we returned home from this enchanting ramble, I rang for tea. That alarming woman, Martha, brought up the things, and, displaying a little drop of blue milk (not cream) in a jug, said, with what seemed to me an air of defiance (but Fred declares she means well) :—

“Mrs. Crumpledum has sent you up *that*, as you didn’t order nothink of the milkman.”

I thanked her humbly, and ventured to add—
“Bring the bread and butter, please, as we hadn’t half dinner enough, and we are very hungry.”

She turned a stony stare upon me. “There *is* no bread nor no butter,” said she, in a sepulchral voice, and I am quite sure that she said it with pleasure.

“No bread and butter ?” cried I.

“You didn’t order none.”

“But what an *extraordinary* house, not to have bread and butter in it !”

“I’m afraid it’s my fault,” said Fred, apologeti-

cally. "You see I forgot it; I only thought about the dinner."

"So like a man," cried I, laughing, "to think only of dinner! However, I must confess that even I should not have thought of *ordering* bread and butter, they seem such a matter of course," and I looked severely at Martha as I spoke.

"I'm afraid *nothing* is a matter of course," replied Fred—"not even salt; but it will be confoundedly difficult to remember all the little things. Perhaps (to Martha)—perhaps Mrs. Crumpledum will be so kind as to let us have a loaf and some butter to night?"

"And some eggs or cold meat," added I; "I *am* so hungry."

"There's the bacon," said Martha, loftily, and went down-stairs.

Then I got up and looked about me.

"Where's the tea?" said I.

"The tea!" cried Fred. "Bless my heart, Georgy, I declare I never thought of the tea!"

I burst out laughing, and pointed mockingly at him. He brushed his great masses of

brown hair almost upright on his head, and was quite out of countenance.

"But you know, Georgy," said he, at last, "I *did* order dinner, and you didn't order anything, though I never told you I was going to do it."

"I never gave it a thought," cried I. "I thought that *mere* meals came somehow of themselves, as a matter of course, in a lodging-house, or I dare say I *should* have thought so ; if I had thought about it at all," I added, more candidly ; "entrees and delicacies, and even coffee, perhaps, one would have to speak about ; but tea, and bread, and butter—why, one couldn't *live* without them, you know, Fred ; they are necessaries of life."

"For all that, we shall have to buy them, and pay for them, too," said my husband.

"Oh, of course I know *that*, foolish boy," replied I, "only I thought we should *get* them."

I was glad that Martha came back with the bread, butter, and bacon just then, so that Fred did not ask me what I meant ; for, though I *believe* I understood my own meaning, I should have found it rather difficult to put it into words

that would have explained it to another person. When Martha had deposited her burthen on the table, he sent his compliments to Mrs. Crumple-dum, and would she be so good as to lend us a little tea for this first evening? and, as Martha soon returned with some tea, we felt that we had fought a good battle, had nobly surmounted all our difficulties, and might partake of the meal before us with good consciences.

Whatever our consciences might be, there was no doubt about our appetites. We ate up everything on the table, and then we confessed to each other that we were still hungry.

"We shall sleep it off—nobody is hungry asleep," said I, encouragingly, "and we'll manage better another day."

The next morning Martha came to ask me, while I was dressing, how much milk she should take in.

"Oh," I said, "a jugful, I suppose."

Martha gave the nearest approach to a smile I had yet seen on her severe countenance, and answered—"We'll try half a pint."

"And, Martha," I said, "we should like some hot rolls and muffins, and new-laid eggs."

"You'll not get 'em, then, mum," said she ;
"it's too late to order anythink now. You must
just have a bit of missus's quartern-loaf, and some
of her butter, and you can settle for your own self
for to-morrow."

"Couldn't we have some fish?"

"No ; you couldn't."

"Oh, very well ; but I must say it's the *oddest*
place I ever was in in my life."

We ate our frugal, not to say scanty, meal in
the highest spirits, and I apologized to Fred for
not having a nicer breakfast.

"You see," I explained, "I haven't begun
housekeeping yet. You must give me some
money this morning, and I shall go out and buy
things."

Fred looked at me with his loving smile.

"You'll make the dearest little housekeeper in
the world," said he.

"I shall buy an oyster knife the very first
thing," I said, "because I am quite determined
not to be the least bit like Dora."

"You're just as pretty and nice," said my plea-
sant husband, "only you've got heaps of sense,

too ; but I think we may defer the purchase of the oyster knife, because, don't you see, this is only May, and oysters are not in season before September."

"Oh, never mind—I only intended it as symbolic ; but how much money will you give me ?" asked I, feeling very important.

He produced his purse from his pocket, opened it, and handed me a sovereign.

"There," said he, "take that, and see how far you can make it go."

"Miles !" cried I. "You'll be astonished to see how much I shall buy with it."

Fred got up, stretched himself, and kissed me.

"What a bore it is having to leave you all day and go to this stupid bank," said he. "I must be there at ten, and I shan't see you again till half-past four—what a horrid bore !" and he kissed me again.

"Wait a minute, dear," I said ; "I'll put on my hat and walk to the bank with you. Then we shall be together till the last minute, and I shall see the look of the place they shut you up in."

I jumped up in a hurry, and running into the next room, got ready to go with him.

"I suppose," said Fred, when I returned, "you'll do your shopping after you've deposited me at the bank?"

"Yes," said I; come along."

"Where's that money I gave you, dear?"

I looked in my hand, felt in my pocket, examined the table and the floor.

"Why, it's nowhere," was all I could find to say.

My husband presented it to me, with a low bow.

"I found it on the carpet as you left the room," said he.

"You shouldn't play tricks with money," I replied, severely; "it's too serious a thing."

"Well, I do like that—when *you* left it tumbling about, and *I* picked it up!"

"You'll be late at the bank if you stand there nagging at your wife," said I, and off we ran into the summer sunshine as gay as two larks.

We went nearly to the top of the High Street, up the steep hill I spoke of, and there we found

the bank, and it consoled me to see that Fred's prison was a handsome building, with plate-glass windows. We shook hands on the steps for fun, and then my dear Fred went reluctantly in, and I retraced my way, happy in the thought that there was nobody in the world to compare with my husband. "What a contrast he will be to *all* the other clerks—poor things!" was my feeling as I went down the hill.

I soon turned into another street, where I saw there were shops of the kind I wanted. A butcher's shop was the first ; but butchers' shops are horrid places, and the sight and the smell was so nasty that I hastily crossed to the other side of the way without buying anything. There I found myself fronting a green-grocer's, always a nice sort of shop, and this one was full of delightful things. Strawberries—the first I had seen this year—I immediately bought two pottles, for I thought—I will have some for dessert, and some again at night ; green peas, new potatoes, radishes, and lettuces. I purchased them all instantly, and began to think marketing was a most agreeable occupation. Then I remembered that I was

not to be like Dora. Dora would have bought the lettuce and forgotten the dressing ; but I knew quite well what salad dressing was made of, so I added a dozen eggs to my purchases, and asked the civil green-grocer where I could get vinegar, mustard and oil. He looked a little surprised, but informed me that Gregg, in High Street, was the best grocer ; so, back I went to High Street, in great spirits at all the nice things I had bought, first telling the man that I would call and pay for them presently. At Gregg's I asked for vinegar, oil, and mustard ; but, when the inquiry was made, how much I required of each, I was quite at a loss.

"Well," I said, slowly, "it is for salad dressing."

"And how much of each will you take, miss ?" persisted the tiresome man—so ignorant of him !

I was driven into a corner, and felt myself blushing. At last, with a good deal of presence of mind, I replied—"The usual quantities, of course." The man was civil, and, after a minute's reflection, produced a tin of mustard and a flask of each of the other things, which I cheerfully

agreed to take. A bottle of curry struck my eye, and I considered that this would be an economical purchase, as it would enable us to have meat dressed a second time. Then I saw a box of French plums, and, as puddings seemed difficult to attain, desserts would be very desirable ; so I bought it also. What other groceries were we likely to want? I could not think of anything. Oh, yes ; tea, of course. Tea and sugar were both to be had here ; so I bought a pound of tea for four and sixpence, and begged the man to put me up half a stone of white sugar, weighing seven pounds. I thought it looked well to seem particular, so I added—"Be sure it is a stone that weighs fourteen pounds, so that the half-stone may be seven pounds precisely," and I laid considerable emphasis on the precisely. It surprised me to see how the man first stared, and then smiled, but I think tradesmen often *have* odd manners ; so I paid the bill—twelve shillings—and begged that the things might be sent at once to Mrs. Crumpledum's. Then I went into a shop and bought a cake and some tartlets—two shillings more ; after that, in order to put off, perhaps, the

most important, but certainly the most disagreeable, part of my marketing as long as I possibly could, I determined to pay for my fruit and vegetables before I ventured into the butcher's shop.

Great was my amazement when I found that my purchases at the green-grocer's—already sent to our lodging, because the boy had other things to leave in the same direction—amounted to eleven shillings !

“Why, what an extraordinary thing that fruit and vegetables should be so dear in the country !” I could not help saying.

“All them articles is forced, ye know, miss,” replied the man who had served me. “Next month and the month arter they’ll be cheap and plenty.”

And, for the first time it occurred to me that new potatoes, green peas, and strawberries were not yet in season, in the very beginning of May.

I had spent three-and-twenty shillings, and had not bought much of a dinner after all ! Not only was Fred's sovereign gone, but every farthing, also, that I had happened to have in my purse ; and yet I seemed to have scarcely bought

anything that was really necessary. I began to be afraid that I was not a good manager, and this idea vexed me very much. What should I do? Feeling decidedly disheartened, I thought the best plan would be to go home at once and tell Martha to get a joint of meat; so I ran hastily into the house, where I had already intended to go to fetch "*Orley Farm*," that I might read it happily in the meadow on the other side of the river. It was one of the books we had bought during our travels, but we had found so much to talk about we had left ourselves very little time for reading; so I had not done more than peep into it as yet. I fetched it now, and, stopping at the top of the kitchen stairs, called down to Martha that I had sent in some vegetables, and we would have them dressed for dinner, and a leg of mutton roasted.

Delighted that my housekeeping was over for the day, I gayly tripped across the bridge, and, finding myself a shady seat under a beautiful horse-chestnut, covered with its exquisite foliage and flowers, I read "*Orley Farm*," and was perfectly happy, till the time came to which I had

been eagerly looking forward, through all my perfect happiness, when I might go and meet my husband on his way home from the bank.

We met in the High Street, and were quite charmed to see each other again, after a separation of more than six hours.

My poor Fred confided to me that he found he did not like banking much.

"It's dull," said he, "unless you happen to be the banker, and then, I dare say, it's awfully jolly."

"Well," said I, "I don't suppose daily duties often *are* pleasant. I don't care much for marketing either: but still, you know, daily duties must be done."

"Spoken like the proverbs of Solomon," said Fred. "We shouldn't have any dinner, should we, unless I earned the money and you spent it—hey, Georgey? and, I must confess, I am uncommonly hungry."

Chatting gayly, we took our places at the dining-table, and, as Martha entered with two dishes in her hands, we nodded at each other a friendly welcome to the meat. She put one before Fred

and the other before me, and lifting the covers, displayed new potatoes in his, and green peas in mine.

"Hallo!" cried Fred, astonished.

"Yes," said I, apologetically, "it's a little mistake; they are very good, but they're forced, and so we shan't have them again. It's a little mistake: they are expensive, but they'll be extremely nice."

"But where's the dinner?"

"Bring the mutton, Martha."

"There bain't none, mum."

"Then bring whatever you got instead," said I, faintly.

"Nothink came, mum."

"But I told you to get a leg of mutton," said I, almost ready to cry.

"No, mum, you didn't; you told me to dress the vegetables and a leg of mutton, but no mutton came, nor nothink."

I looked at Fred, and he at me. He began to whistle, and I melted into tears.

"I am so sorry," was all I could say.

"Give my compliments to Mrs. Crumpledum,"

said Fred, "and ask her to be so good as to let us have a little of any cold meat she may happen to have in the house."

Martha departed, and Fred jumped up, and, running round, kissed away my tears.

"I spent all the money, and more," said I, in despair, "and there's no dinner."

"You'll do better next time," said my kind husband.

At that moment Martha returned, carrying in a dish the fag end of a boiled leg of pork, decidedly more underdone than done.

"Please, sir, Mrs. Crumpledum's compliments," said Martha, very cheerfully, as she put the dish down on the table, "and next Friday week is a fortnight, and she begs you'll look out for other lodgings."

"Confound her impudence !" cried Fred.

CHAPTER III.

OUR FIRST ACCOUNTS.

AFTER that we tried to eat our dinners. We bore with the pork, and enjoyed the vegetables ; and then the tartlets, strawberries, prunes and cake made an excellent dessert.

"In fact," said Fred, soothingly, "if it is not a dinner, it's a feast."

"Yes ; but then it cost such a lot of money," I replied, with a great sigh.

"But, then, it's a feast," urged he, almost reproachfully.

"At any rate, I've had my lesson—my two lessons. I'll always begin with the most important thing first, and I'll ask the price of everything *before* I buy it ; and certainly I'll take care, dear Fred, that such a horrid business as *this* never happens again."

"I hope so, I'm sure, darling, if it makes you cry. This is the first time I've seen you cry since our wedding-day."

I laughed, and said it was not worth crying about, only I felt so sorry to have managed badly, and that he should not have any dinner.

"Call it a feast," he replied, "and it at once becomes a treat instead of a mistake."

"After the feast is quite done," I said, "I think it would be a good plan to settle our affairs a little."

"Settle how much?" cried my husband, evidently surprised at the solemnity of the address.

"But first," said I, "let me tell you that, though we have had no dinner, we may have a capital supper. I bought twelve eggs for the salad-dressing, and I perceive you have only used two."

"Twelve eggs! Oh, you magnificent princess! Twelve eggs for a salad-dressing for two people!"

"Don't make remarks, sir. I simply mentioned a fact. It will be intolerable if you make a remark every time I find it necessary to mention a fact!"

Fred bowed.

"Now listen," cried I, "I'm going to talk sense."

"If that's a fact," quoth he, "which, however, I must be permitted to doubt, it's deuced hard not to be allowed to make a remark about it."

"Colonel Milman says," I continued, speaking very earnestly, "that *whatever* a man's income may be, he never *really* enjoys life unless he lives a little beyond it."

"That's a fact, at any rate," cried Fred, "and one people are generally willing enough to accept, though rather shy of announcing. The Colonel's a brick!"

"I'm not sure," said I, gravely, "that in repeating Colonel Milman's observation, I have not mistaken one word, and that instead of saying *beyond*, I ought to have said *within*."

Fred gave a long whistle.

"That's a damper," said he, "and lowers my opinion of the Colonel considerably."

"Shall I go on talking sense, or would you rather chat about it?"

"Go on, by all means."

"Very well, then, I believe the only way of accomplishing this end is to apportion our income to our means."

"Hullo!"

I looked at him.

"I beg pardon, I'm sure," said he; "it sounds uncommonly well, but *does* it mean anything?"

"Doesn't it, really? Let me see. No, it means nothing whatever. I've evidently mistaken a word again. Income and means can't both be right—can they? I wonder what it is I wanted to say?"

"I'm sure I haven't the least idea."

"Haven't you, really, now? How unlucky! Ah, don't you see, I said the very word!" cried I joyfully; "wanted! and *wants* is the word."

"Hullo! we're not playing at any sort of buried cities, are we?"

"No, sir; we are not playing at anything. We are dealing with the sad and sober realities of life."

"Very sad and sober, indeed," replied he, kissing me. By this time we were sitting side by side on the sofa, and his arm was round my waist.

"And what we have to do is to apportion our income to our wants—or—our wants to our income. Oh, Fred, which is it? I haven't a notion—have you?"

"In my opinion, either would do."

"Then," said I, doubtfully, "you don't think one is the contrary of the other?"

"Not a bit of it—quite the reverse. Go on, Georgy, and prosper."

"Well, you see, now comes the difficult part. What is our income? I always forget."

"I've got a hundred and twenty pounds a year, and you've got fifty."

"Very well; that is, a hundred and twenty and fifty—a hundred and fifty and twenty—oh, a hundred and seventy pounds a year."

"Exactly; no financier could have calculated the sum better."

"Very well; now let us begin. What is the rent of this lodging?"

"One pound a week, and that includes cooking and attendance, and gas and kitchen fire."

"My goodness! Why, that's almost everything, and all for a pound a week! How very satisfactory! Let me see—there are fifty-two weeks in the year; so that makes exactly fifty-two pounds. Now let us go on to something else. Only Aunt Dolly says we should always leave a

margin—reckon everything at a little more than it is, so as to leave a margin. Now, fifty would be easy, but unluckily it gives the margin the wrong way. However, two is difficult, and sixty would be too much ; but we *can't* carry two into everything—it would be so very tiresome ; so we'll call it fifty, and then we'll have a *big* margin the other way on the first opportunity."

"I think I see. It's rather a novel way of doing accounts, and of getting a margin, and I mightn't find it answer at the bank ; but, perhaps, it may do for *us*."

"Of course it will ; but what do you think ought to come next to rent—clothes ? Yes, clothes. Now, how much a year will you want for clothes, Fred ?"

"I'm sure I don't know. I've got everything new now, and so have you, Georgy. I might make fifteen or twenty pounds do. Let us say fifteen."

"Only fifteen pounds ! Good gracious, Fred, how cheap men's clothes must be ! Well, I'll take as little as ever I can, too—thirty, perhaps. That would make forty-five with your fifteen ; and now

you see the use of leaving a margin. We may make it fifty with clear consciences, and, as we had (luckily) two the *wrong* way to begin with, that is really only adding three, though it looks like five ; and so we have fifty and fifty, which make a hundred—that's nice, coming out such an easy number. We can go on delightfully from a hundred ; but there doesn't seem much left that we shall want to buy. There *must* be things we don't think of—*mustn't* there, Fred ?”

“The sitting-room fire is to be half-a-crown a week.”

“Why, that would be fifty-two half-crowns—how tiresome ! but no : we've not got any fire now, and we shan't have any for months. How many weeks in the year I wonder shall we use fires in the sitting-room ? Are you chilly ? I'm not. Half fifty-two ? Twenty-six. Oh, what a nasty number ? It's no use attempting to do anything with such a number as *that*. Let us call it thirty. Thirty half-crowns—dear me, it's getting difficult. Eight half-crowns make a pound ; sixteen, two ; twenty-four, three ; and thirty-two, four. So we'd better make it thirty-two, and reckon four pounds

for sitting-room fire : that's one hundred and four. Now, let us get something that will cost six pounds, and bring it up to a hundred and ten."

"Cigars ?" suggested Fred.

"Nonsense ! as if I would let you spend six pounds a year on cigars."

"Chignons ?"

"Don't be a goose ! Suppose we say stationery !"

"Stationery !"

"Yes ; stamps, and pens, and paper. Suppose you and I each write, on an average, a letter a day : that would be fourteenpence a week for stamps. But I never can calculate all through the year fourteen pence a week : it is not even as if four twopences make sixpence ; so we'll call it a shilling a week. It's only cutting off the Sundays, and we won't write letters, as a rule, on Sundays. Well, there are fifty-two shillings, or two pounds twelve, at once ; then reckon pens and ink at eight shillings, and we've got three pounds, and it's odd if paper and envelopes don't cost three more ; so now I have got my six pounds, and am at a hundred and ten ; and really and truly, Fred, I can't think of anything more there is to buy."

"Coffins, my dear Georgy, and grave clothes—calculate an easy sum for them, please—for, if we are never to have anything to eat or drink, we shall very soon require them, I'm afraid."

"To eat and drink! Is it possible? Didn't I really? Oh, Fred, it's worse than the dinner to-day. How very, very stupid I am!"

"Well, my dear, make the *amende* at once."

"Yes, and to do it thoroughly I'll begin with meat; for, though butchers' shops *are* nasty, still it is actually necessary we should eat meat."

"I *should* like a little now and then, I confess."

"Poor boy! you didn't get much to-day." Then, after a little pause, I said, softly—"Do you know *anything* about it, Fred, or *could* you make a guess? I feel as if I couldn't, though I've been trying, and generally I can guess anything."

"A soldier's allowance of meat is a pound a day."

"Is it really? How glad I am! Then, let us say the same for us."

"Can you eat as much as a soldier, Georgy, such a little bit of a woman as you are?"

"I'm not a little bit of a woman. I'm five feet

four, and I haven't the least notion how many pounds of meat I can eat ; but I know I have an excellent appetite. It's rather unlucky, as we are poor, that we have both of us such very good appetites. I think it may be better to reckon a pound of meat a day a piece, because it wouldn't be nice never to have any go out, and one might want luncheon now and then. Have we got to feed Martha or Mrs. Crumpledum, by-the-bye?"

"Good gracious, Georgy, what ideas you have ! No ; certainly not."

"Oh, I don't want to feed them in the least : I only want to know. Well, two pounds of meat a day : and what is meat a pound ? I know—yes, I really do ; I heard them talking about it only the other day—it's tenpence : fourteen tenpences every week. Oh, come, that won't do at all, and we can't cut off the Sundays here, for people always have rather *better* dinners on Sundays ; but I never can manage fourteen tenpences a week, so call them shillings : beefsteaks always *are* a shilling a pound. Fourteen shillings a week—that's two pounds and four sevens a month—seven, fourteen, twenty-one, twenty-

eight—that's one pound eight, and two pounds make three pounds eight. No ; I'm all wrong. What could put sevens into my head ? It is four fours, and that's sixteen. It's only two pounds sixteen a month— isn't it, Fred ?"

"It would be difficult to make it anything else, my dear Georgy."

"Two pounds sixteen a month. Very well, let us try to do that ; it's easy enough at first—it's twenty-four pounds, but then come a lot of sixteen shillingses."

"I observe, my love, that you have rather an original method of doing compound addition. You invariably begin with the pounds."

"I wonder everybody doesn't, it is so *much* easier ; but what am I ever to do with all these sixteens ? There are twelve tens, to be sure ; that would be six pounds, and would make thirty pounds a year. Suppose we reckon the butcher's bill at thirty pounds a year, Fred, and don't mind the sixes ? That's the simplest way, and is the use of margins, you see. We had such a capital margin that we can afford to draw upon it, and it is best to simplify matters when we can ; so

there's thirty to add to a hundred and ten, and we've got a hundred and forty. Now, Fred, we've just thirty pounds a year left, and we must be very careful with our last thirty. What shall we do with it?"

"Get my shirts washed now and then, please."

"Washing! To think that I should have forgotten washing! Of all things in the world, to forget washing! I am sure we couldn't do with less than five or ten shillings a week for washing—could we? Let us say five, for that makes twelve pounds a year; and, when we're so near the end, uneven numbers don't signify so much."

"Is twelve an uneven number?"

"I'm thinking of one hundred and fifty-two."

"And is *that* an uneven number?"

"Yes, of course it is. Oh, you needn't laugh; you know what I mean. There's the two breaking in on the ten—a hundred and fifty-two, instead of a hundred and fifty; but I don't mind when we are so near the end. Now, we've got eighteen pounds left. What shall we spend them on, Fred?"

"Bread, butter, baccy, bacon, blacking, beer,

tea, sugar, soap, sherry, salt, candles, pepper, pickles, poultry, potatoes, fish, vegetables, mustard, milk, flour, eau de Cologne, glycerine, whiskey, newspapers, books, visiting, eggs, charity sermons, doctors' bills, twine, glue, blotting-paper, and so on."

I looked, as I felt, rather blank.

"Well," I said at last, very slowly, "I have got an account-book, and I mean to keep accounts, and I shall put down the sums we have been talking about to begin upon, and apportion them out, and then put down what we spend each week, and compare and see how we manage ; but there are such a *quantity* of things to buy, that the greatest difficulty will be remembering them all. However, one thing I am quite determined on, and that is, to learn how to do it all, and to *do it*."

Again Fred kissed me.

"What a good girl you are, Georgy !" said he.

And so ended our first accounts.

CHAPTER IV.

WE SETTLE OURSELVES.

AFTER this a week went by very pleasantly, and I really began to understand about ordering things, and we generally had enough to eat, sometimes we had too much. Witness my first joint : an enormous sirloin of coarse beef, of which Fred and I both got so very tired, especially as Mrs. Crumpledum did not understand how to make curry, that after it had appeared, first hot, then cold, then hashed, and then minced, and at the end of the fourth day looked as large as ever, we had to request Mrs. Crumpledum to be so good as to finish it for us. The kind woman agreed, saying she should always be glad to help us when she could, and it was then that she retracted her notice to quit.

We always had a most agreeable breakfast,

after which Fred went to his bank, and I walked with him, and we invariably shook hands at the foot of the handsome flight of steps, with the gravest countenance we could command. We had agreed it would look better not to pay ready money for everything, but have weekly bills. There was an importance in weekly bills ; so I made purchases, inquiring first the price of what I wanted, and at the end of the week I was to see if these wants had exceeded our means. Business over, I returned home, wrote any letters I might happen to have, but I had few correspondents, played a little on a piano Fred had hired for me, and then took my book, and some buns for my luncheon, into the fields across the river. At last the delicious moment came when I might again walk up the High Street to meet my husband after his day's work. How happy we were to meet ! how difficult it was to repress the sign of our pleasure into proper High Street coldness of demeanor ! Then, on our return home, a merry dinner, then a delightful walk, exploring together a lovely country new to both of us, then tea, and after that, perhaps, a little music, a song, in which

our voices joined, when it seemed to me that those voices, incomplete apart, had been made to unite together ; or Fred would read aloud a little poetry, or a chapter or two of some amusing book, while I worked. I had on hand a cap I was embroidering and a purse I was knitting, both for him, but I also dearly liked to perform what I considered more useful work for him, and I strongly suspect that he sometimes twisted the buttons off his shirts, because of the extreme pleasure he saw it gave me to sew them on again ; and so each happy day drew to its close, and each morrow seemed happier than the day that had gone away before it.

On Sunday we went twice to church. I had always been accustomed to do so, and when Fred demurred at the second service, it made me feel quite sorrowful, and I assured him so earnestly that I was certain it was right, that he yielded instantly, even kissing me as he did so. There never was any one so kind or so amiable as my Fred. After we had appeared in church, two or three people called : the clergyman, whom I did not much like, and who Fred said was a bore, and

I am afraid he was one ; he seemed to be a good little man, but so very much occupied by himself that it made his conversation a trifle dreary. His wife was a fat, simpering, rather vulgar woman, and neither of them appeared inclined to be more than civil ; but we did not want any society beyond each other's, Fred and I, so we did not care about that. The doctor and *his* wife called also. He was a pleasant, gentlemanly man, but seemed to have a great deal more to do than the clergyman—I suppose the bodies of people require more looking after than their souls—and his wife, though a little stern I thought, was clever and agreeable. Fred called *her* a she-dragoon, and could not forgive her for saying that she did something or other—I forget what—"on her own hook ;" but, then, Fred is so very particular about ladies. How I hope I shall always please him as much as I do now ! What *should* I do if I found Fred did not like and admire everything I say and do ? Then an elderly maiden lady called and asked me if I would take a district. Fancy me a district visitor ! I declined as politely as ever I could, but, at the same time, could hardly keep from

laughing. Fred was not home from the bank, so I felt quite unprotected. But she looked at me with the pleasantest smile in the world, and said :—

“I dare say you don’t think about such things much just now, Mrs. Clare, and you might not be able to attend to a district.”

I laughed a little then, and said no, I didn’t think I could ; but, as I said it I thought her face was delightful, and I longed to tell her so.

“Well,” she said, “perhaps you might do a little, notwithstanding. My district is so large I find it difficult to do *all* I wish, and there is a poor blind woman lives near your house who would be *so* glad of a visit now and then.”

“But I never visited a poor person in my life.”

“No,” smiling very kindly, “I dare say not. You are so young, you know ; but, if you *could*, your gay voice would be a great joy to her. You are very happy, you see, and she is not.”

And then she shook hands with me warmly, and looked so kindly into my face, that I felt the tears—I am sure I don’t know why—rising up into my eyes.

Her words—the last she had uttered—rang in my ears long after she was gone : “you are very happy, you see, and she is not !” No, of course she was not : a poor blind woman. Was she married, I wonder, and, if so, did she love her husband, and did he love her ; then, even though poor and blind, she might still be happy. But Miss Gibbons had said she was *not* happy ; so probably she was not married at all. Then I began to think how dreadful it must be not to be happy. What *should* I do—what *could* I do—if I was not happy ? To be alive, and yet not happy ! It seemed too horrible to think of.

The result of all this reflection was, that when Fred came home that day I asked him if I might take a district.

“A how much ?” was, of course, his reply.

“I wish you wouldn’t call everything ‘how much,’ Fred ; there really is not any wit in it.”

“My goodness, darling, don’t be snappish, please ; I am so easily frightened.”

“But what would you think of my taking a district, Fred ?”

“Please tell me what a district is, dear ?”

"Oh, Fred, don't you know, and you a clergyman's son? It's a bit of a place, full of poor people, that a lady visits; but, you must know, they divide a town into districts, and a number of ladies become district visitors, and each one undertakes one of the divisions, and it is called her district."

"But, my darling Georgy, I'm sure you don't want to go poking about into such nasty places."

"I needn't poke, Fred, and I can't say I *do* want it. It would be a desperate undertaking, and I should be horribly frightened."

"Besides which, if you go in for this sort of thing, I might as well have been a clergyman at once."

"I don't quite see that."

"What a dear, pretty little clergyman's wife you would make!"

"I had rather not be the wife of a dear, pretty little clergyman."

"Now, you're hypercritical, my love."

"But, Fred, there is a poor blind woman that I *do* want to visit."

"My goodness, what a very odd want! Why?"

"Because," said I, blushing, "I am so happy,

and she is not, and Miss Gibbons says my gay voice would do her good."

"I think your gay voice would do any one good, darling. Visit your poor blind woman, by all means."

"You see, Fred, it has just occurred to me to-day that everybody ought, perhaps, to try to be of a little use—even I might."

"You are of use, Georgy; you're of no end of use to *me*; of so much use, that I could'nt get on no how without you."

"Yes, of course I am, you foolish fellow," replied I, nestling up to him; "but, then, you and I are one. Now, I fancy we should try to be of a little use, if we can, to other people, and give them a tiny little bit of our great happiness if we can."

"What a good girl you are, Georgy! By George! I hadn't a notion you were so good."

"Why did you marry me, then, dear?"

"Because I was in love with you."

"But why did you fall in love with me, then?"

"Because you were pretty and charming, and altogether a most uncommonly nice girl," said Fred.

"And not because you thought I was good?"

"Upon my life, Georgy, I don't believe I thought about *that* at all. However, I fell in love with you because you were what you are; so it doesn't signify."

"Well, I shouldn't have fallen in love with *you*, Fred," said I, softly, "unless I had thought you very, *very* good."

"And I believe, darling, that in the long run I shall love the goodness as much as any other part of you," said Fred, contentedly.

"Only I am *not* particularly good," answered I, laughing, "so don't expect too much of me; but I *love* goodness, and so do you, dear Fred, and you *are* good."

"I'm neither worse nor better than my neighbors," replied he, philosophically; "I'm good enough for every-day wear, and in my best clothes I'll pass muster on Sundays."

"I think Miss Gibbons *is* particularly good," said I, "and I like her better than any of the others."

"Better than the she-dragoon or Mrs. Simper? Well, that's no very great compliment, after all."

"I like the she-dragoon also."

"Do you like everybody, Georgy?"

"Oh, dear, no! For instance, I don't like Martha one bit, and I don't like Mrs. Simper, as you call her."

"And you *do* like old Simper?"

"He doesn't simper, so you needn't call him so, and it is not respectful to a clergyman."

"Oh, I'm not going to be respectful to clergymen yet awhile, Georgy. I'm not four-and-twenty yet, you know; so I've lots of time for the heavy father style without beginning it now."

It was at the end of this delightful week that Fred one day took away my breath by telling me he had found out it was all a mistake, and he could not remain in the bank.

"Not remain in the bank!" I cried, echoing his words, under the idea that I must have mistaken them.

"Not by no means," was his elegant rejoinder.

"But, my dearest Fred, why not? *What* has happened, and what *can* you mean?"

"Nothing has happened, and I mean just exactly what I say."

"But *why* not?"

"It is not a position for a gentleman."

"Isn't it? Isn't it really?"

"No, it isn't, and it isn't really, and it's just the same in whatever form you put the question."

"But you were so anxious to get the appointment, and so delighted when it came."

"That was because I knew nothing at all about it," replied Fred, "and because I wanted to marry you, my dear."

"Oh, Fred!"

"And, oh, Georgy! And now you see I *have* married you, and so it is of no further use in *that* way, and I find the thing itself won't do."

"But why not, Fred?"

"Well, you see, I happen to have had a gentleman's education. I know a lot of things, Georgy, and I've spent a lot of years acquiring that knowledge; and, for all I have to do now, I might just as well have learnt nothing on earth except to read and to write, and to understand the difference between half-crowns and florins."

"Well, but, Fred, isn't that nonsense? It's only for a few hours of the day."

"It's my life, my love. It's the work I am to do, with little enough to look forward to beyond it. I might just as well be a shopman. I'm not a bit more of a gentleman, and my education is not of a bit more use, than if I was at Swan & Edgar's measuring out ribands. I stand behind a counter all day, and shovel out gold and silver. By Jove! am not I tempted to put some of it in my pocket now and then!"

"But do you really stand behind a counter?"

"Really and truly, and often enough with nothing on earth to do."

"I thought you had to keep books, and do desperately difficult and complicated accounts—almost mathematics."

"From ten in the morning to four in the afternoon I sit (or stand) behind a counter, and either do nothing at all or shovel out gold and silver."

"A sort of Tom Tidler's ground."

"Is it, by Jove? I wish it were, for then I should get some of the spoil myself. I'll tell you what, Georgy, some fine morning I shall fill my pockets with old Fortescue's treasure, and then I shall take you under one arm, and my

portmanteau under the other, and we'll be off to America."

"Don't talk so, Fred: I don't like it. You look as if you longed for it, really."

"Don't I, just? I *do* long for it! I do long for that old curmudgeon's riches, so that I might be a gentleman again, and enjoy life with my wife."

"But you *are* a gentleman; nothing could make you anything but a gentleman, and you wouldn't enjoy life if you were a thief."

"Not unless I was a very rich thief," replied Fred, thoughtfully.

"Really," cried I, "I wish you would not talk so. You look so like earnest that it makes me uncomfortable. But, oh, Fred! are you really not happy?"

"I am as happy as forty kings, my pet, when I am at home with you."

"But you are not happy at the bank?"

"Well, Georgy, the shining hours are *not* pleasantly spent behind a counter, and with plenty of time to compare the past with the present, and to wonder why I ever learned Latin, and Greek,

and French, and mathematics, and all the rest."

I felt that every word he said was true.

A gloomy look came into his dear eyes, which I could not bear to see, and the tears sprang up into mine to meet it.

"Oh, my darling Fred!" I cried, "if, after all, you are not happy."

He clasped me in his arms, and kissed the tears away.

"I am happy with you, my dear little love," he replied.

"And you will bear it, and try not to mind it," I whispered, "just while it *must* last, and we will do everything we can think of, and make every possible effort for you to change into something else."

"Only, then, old Fortescue must not snub me," said my husband; "he *must* treat me like a gentleman."

"But doesn't he?" cried I. "Does he dare to snub you?" and in my inmost mind I vowed vengeance against old Fortescue.

"He snubbed me to-day because I was ten minutes late, the brute."

"What a shame ! I suppose he is not a gentleman—is he ?"

"He thinks himself one. Oh, I believe his family's good enough, and he's just made of money."

"That is no reason why he should snub *you*."

"And the head clerk, old Grimble, looks as if he'd like to snub me, too. He has no end of cheek, and speaks to the other fellows as if they were schoolboys ; but he'd better not try it on with me."

"I should think not ; but he won't, Fred—I'm quite sure he won't."

"It's a mistake from first to last, Georgy. I don't mind, because we can't live upon nothing, and I couldn't have married you without doing something ; but now I *have* married you, my darling, I might as well get something else : I shouldn't like to think I am to be a banker's clerk all my life."

"You might be anything ! Oh, no, Fred ! that would never do. If you look about for something else, I'm sure you'll get it immediately. Everybody in any profession would be only too delighted to get a man like you into it."

CHAPTER V.

FRED'S FRIEND.

THE next day Fred returned home in better spirits. He bounded down the steps at the bank two at a time, and joined me in the street, with a bright smile on his lips, and that look of gay affection in his eyes, which was dearer far to me than the light of the summer sun.

"That's not half a bad fellow," said he.

"Who?" cried I, delighted.

"Young Fortescue."

"Young Fortescue! Why, I thought he was old Fortescue, and a horrid brute, yesterday."

"Old Fortescue? So he is, yesterday, and to-day, and forever; but this isn't himself at all—it's only his son."

"Oh, young Fortescue is old Fortescue's son?"

"Exactly, and not half a bad fellow besides."

"And where did you meet him?"

"Why, in the bank, to be sure. He's to be a clerk in the bank."

"Not really? Oh, Fred, how glad I am! Why, if old Fortescue puts his own son in, it can't be ungentlemanly!"

"Ungentlemanly! No, no; that's too strong a word. But, then, I suppose Jack Fortescue is only learning the work, and will be his father's partner one of these days. Lucky dog! and that makes all the difference in the world, you know, Georgy."

"Yes," I replied, reluctantly, "of course it does; but at any rate, you will have a gentleman, and the banker's own son, to associate with; and then," with a sudden glow, "why shouldn't *you* be a partner also, some day? If you become this young man's dearest friend, he will take you into partnership surely when he is one himself."

"Partnership, and dearest friend!" cried Fred, first staring, then laughing, and then fondly stroking my hair; "what a child you are, Georgy!"

"Am I?"

"Yes, you are, and how much more dearly I love you than if you were a finished woman !"

"I suppose I shall be a finished woman some day," said I, smiling ; "and pray, don't forget that you'll have to love me then."

"I shall love you whatever you are : I'm not a bit afraid to promise *that* ; but, meantime, Jack Fortescue is an uncommonly nice fellow, and I shall bring him here and introduce him to you the first opportunity."

"I shall be delighted to make his acquaintance."

"And then his brute of a father, who has never condescended to ask us to dinner, or to appear to remember that his clerks may come from the same rank of life as himself, will hear what sort of a wife one of them has got, and may be brought to his bearings."

"Oh, Fred, but that's nonsense, I think. How could he tell anything about me ? and, unless you had had a particular introduction, he would not be likely to invite *you*—would he ?"

"The more shame for him, Georgy ; but he'll be sorry now."

I could not help laughing, and asking why he should be sorry.

"You've been a week in his bank," I said, "and what should he be sorry for? Even if he *meant* to visit us, there hasn't been time. Don't let us begin life, Fred, by being touchy, and expecting to be slighted; it's not a cheerful plan."

"One doesn't thrive on it, hey?" said Fred, laughing.

"No, not a bit, and yet it's meat and drink to some people. I've known people who were quite vexed if you proved to them that a friend had *not* intended to slight them; but they didn't *thrive* on it either. They were not comfortable-looking people."

"Thin, with sharp noses and red tips to them? Well, if ever I get a red tip to my nose, Georgy, I promise you it shall be from something jollier than looking out for slights."

I glanced laughingly at my handsome husband: the idea of *his* nose ever having a red tip to it!

"So," said I, "for the present you must pardon old Fortescue for the offences he has not com-

mitted, and bring his son here without believing that the revelations he makes at home afterwards, will fill his father's heart with remorse."

"Serve him right if they did, the old brute," replied Fred, with the utmost complacency ; and, when I told him he was incorrigible, he demanded "Why?" with perfect simplicity.

The next day was Sunday, and one of the happiest days I ever spent in my life : the bright spring weather was so delicious, and Fred and I were so fond of each other. To be living and loving on such a day as that, under a sky of such cloudless blue, and with all the little new blossoms and grasses under our feet, seemed joy enough for a lifetime. What more can any one desire than to be alive and in love on a summer day ? We went to church twice, and ate a cold dinner between the services. After the second service we crossed the bridge, and took one of those enchanting rambles which always set me wondering, how anything, except in winter time, can ever be esteemed a pleasure, that has to be done within the walls and under the roof of a house. Certainly a house is nothing better than a necessary

evil, and with such a world outside, it should only be sought in stress of weather. For my part, in the native climate of the Gipsies, I think a Gipsy's life must be perfection ; but, to enjoy a Gipsy's life, I acknowledge that I might require their native climate. On this particular Sunday evening, everything that could be desired, even by a Gipsy, in the shape of lovely weather, was granted to us. It was warm for May, but with that fresh dewy warmth that June, with all her additional charms, can only remember ; and, as we strolled through the pretty woods, I fancied the trees bent their stately branches forward to welcome us, and that the little wild flowers looked gayly up into our faces.

"Does it all seem just the same to people who do not love each other?" I said, softly, to my husband.

"Nothing looks the same to me as it did before I had a dear little wife on my arm," was his pleasant reply.

"Isn't it strange—doesn't it seem strange—that we could have lived so many, many years, and not even known of each other's existence?" sighed I.

"So many, many years!" echoed Fred. "Let me see—how many? You eighteen, and I twenty-three."

"Yes, but they make nearly our whole lives—quite our whole lives—except a few months, and yet those months are everything, and all the rest nothing."

"What should we have done, my pet, if I had not come to that ball at Milman's? and I was within an ace of not coming. I had two other invitations for that week, and I had written, actually written, to accept one of them, when Denison walked in and persuaded me to run down with him instead to the Manor House; so I put the note in the fire, and came. But for that lucky chance, we should not be here now, Georgy."

"Oh yes, we should," replied I, confidently; "that alternative is impossible. We should have met somehow somewhere else. Those sort of things *can't* be chance: marriages are made in heaven."

"Very dirty work they must have sometimes then, if *all* marriages are made up there."

"Hush ! Don't, dear Fred ; it sounds profane, and is certainly not nice."

"I beg your pardon, Georgy. May I say that if marriages are made in heaven, Denison was the jolly old angel with a carrotty beard who settled ours for us ?"

"No, dear, I'd rather you didn't say that."

"But then, my dear Georgy, what *may* I say ?"

"Nothing like jokes on sacred subjects, dear Fred ; we are so happy, we *ought* to be good."

"Why, I thought it was the other thing made people good."

"I don't know ; I was never taught much about it. One isn't at school ; but, since I was given you, Fred"——

"You're not given me, darling ; you're given *to* me. The wife is one of the husband's chattels, not the husband one of the wife's. Please remember that, dear Georgy."

"Oh, I'm quite ready ; it doesn't make the least difference. I like to feel I belong to you ; but, since you stepped into my life, and took me for your own, and brought all this brilliant joy with you, and I, too, as I know, give the same to you,

you can't think how I find I am feeling. I didn't know I was, till I suddenly found it out ; but it is a sort of thought as if such happy creatures as we are, should tread on tip-toe, with light, careful steps, for fear we should do or say anything wrong, and so spoil all."

"Do you really feel that?" said Fred, thoughtfully.

"Yes, dear. . Don't you have the same sort of feeling now and then—I mean, don't you find it's there, though you've no notion how it grew and came?"

"Not a bit of it," said Fred, stoutly ; "I never had a thought of the kind."

"Oh!" said I, rather disappointed, and looked at him with wistful eyes, that cleared up in another moment, "yes, of course, that's because you were always good. You wouldn't need to have that sort of feeling, of course."

And I was perfectly satisfied.

"I don't know about that," said my husband.

"No," replied I, laughing, and pressing the arm on which I leant, to my side ; "I dare say you don't, but I do."

"I know you're a darling, and that I love you, and that I'll try to be a good fellow always, for your sake."

"And I'll try always to be a good wife to you."

"You're the dearest and best little wife in the world without trying, and you needn't try to be anything else. Be yourself—that's all I want—and just as good as nature made you, and don't try to be goody, or you won't be Georgy."

I reflected a minute. What did he mean? At first I could not see light, but then it seemed to come.

"Not try to be goody? No, that I won't. I'll only try *to be good*, and not be goody at all; but just saying these little thoughts and feelings in a wood, isn't being goody—is it now, dear Fred?"

I spoke very coaxingly, and I suppose laid an emphasis on the words "in a wood," for the thoughts had sprung naturally out of the lovely scene, and were then spoken from the impulse of the moment.

Fred laughed as he answered—"No, darling, not if you only say them in a wood—never in a

drawing-room, Georgy ; and, above all, never in a drawing-room in which we also dine."

I laughed, too. Fred is so droll and amusing that he can always make me laugh with those quaint, unexpected remarks of his.

By this time it was growing late, and we retraced our steps towards home. As we were crossing the bridge, a gentleman came slowly towards us, smoking a cigar. To me he was a stranger, but I soon saw that he knew Fred, and while he smiled and shook hands with him, he glanced curiously, but not in the least rudely towards me.

I thought that in his personal appearance this gentleman was a striking contrast to my dear Fred. He was about as tall—that is to say nearly six feet—but by no means as muscular or strong looking. He was pale and sallow, with a wan, weary look in his face, and haggard eyes. I had seen men like him at the Manor House, and I had overheard Colonel Milman call them "dissipated-looking fellows."

I remembered those words at the same instant that I looked at this man's face ; and there was

my Fred with his bright cheery blue eyes, his thick chestnut hair curling all about his smooth, white forehead, and his bronzed cheeks where the color of health glowed. His is a face in which, though the features are really good and handsome, the first thing that strikes you is the expression. It is so full of manly sweetness, so genial and joyous, that the first thought is, what a charming face! and only the second, what a handsome one!

While I was comparing the countenances of the two men, and feeling my heart beat with happy pride as I did so, Fred was returning the stranger's hand-shaking in a very friendly way.

"Why, Clare, I never expected to meet you here," cried the latter, warmly, with furtive glances at me all the time.

"Let me introduce you to my wife," cried Fred, and, with happy pride, I saw how happy and proud he was as he spoke—"Georgy, this is Mr. Fortescue, whom you heard me speak of."

I curtsied, and the gentleman bowed.

"I had not the least idea you were married," said he. "Faith, you've begun early."

"It's never too soon for a good move—is it, Georgy?" said Fred, lightly.

"You are not so very young," replied I, in the same manner, yet feeling a little resentfully towards Mr. Fortescue, though I hardly knew why. I fancied there was a sneering tone in his remark. "Older, I should think, than"—but here I came to a pause.

"I'll bet a pony he isn't," said Mr. Fortescue, pleasantly; "or, if the bet is with you, Mrs. Clare, I'll say a dozen of Jouvin's best, or anything else you like; but I think I may venture to affirm I am the elder of the two."

"I don't think you are," replied I, nettled, though I'm sure I couldn't have explained why.

"A dozen of Jouvin's best?" said he, in a very insinuating manner.

I looked at Fred. He was laughing and amused, so I said—"Very well, I have no objection; but we shall require proofs, you know."

"Proofs!" cried he, quite excited; "but what proofs?"

"Oh, I can act as witness to F—, to Mr. Clare's age; but you will require a witness also, of course."

"I'll produce my baptismal register, if nothing else will content you."

"A competent, impartial witness will be sufficient."

"And are *you* an impartial witness on the other side?" cried he, with a quick glance.

I blushed, but answered quickly—"Certainly, as far as the point of age goes—quite impartial."

"Yes," he said, fixing his eyes on me with an unmistakable admiration, which gave me pleasure, because I knew it would please my Fred. "If the gentleman in question has come to man's estate he is senior to you, as every husband ought to be to his wife ; and so you are, on that one point, an impartial witness."

"And am I to have no voice in the matter at all?" asked Fred, quietly.

"You are to be permitted to state your age," replied I, gravely, "and if your statement is doubted, I am to bear witness as to its truth or falsehood."

"And the other party?" continued Fred.

"He may make his statement, but must produce a witness also."

"Where's your wife, Mr. Fortescue?" said Fred.

"Echo answers, 'Where?'" was the reply, "or, if it was an Irish echo, it would answer, 'Nowhere ;' but, if you will give me time enough, I will get married on purpose."

We all laughed at this, and as we had now reached our lodgings, Fred invited Mr. Fortescue to come in and drink tea with us, which he instantly agreed to do.

As we went up-stairs, I said quietly—"Your nurse would do just as well ; so you needn't get married unless you like."

"I'd much rather not," he replied, quickly ; "but I would do anything, even that, to decide this wager in a manner that will satisfy *you*."

"The sentiment does the greatest honor to your honesty."

"Does it really ? Well, now, I thought it was to my gallantry. Which is it, Mr. Clare ?"

"How should I know ? Am I your witness ? Ask your wife or your nurse : don't ask me," said Fred.

"The one is to be, and the other was," replied

Mr. Fortescue ; “but my friend, I hope, is. May I not apply to you as my friend who exists at the moment ?”

“Can friendships be formed in twenty-four hours ?” asked I, a little disdainfully.

“I have heard of loves at *first sight*,” said he, “and love is more than friendship—isn’t it ?”

I could not help blushing furiously ; and Mr. Fortescue, who, of course, had not guessed that that arrow would shoot home, could not help laughing a little under his breath.

Meantime Martha brought the tea things, and I was glad that during this week of housekeeping I had really learned how to manage things, and to preside over a not ill-arranged tea-table. Even in Mrs. Crumpledum’s lodgings, and even with Martha to wait, I felt that there was nothing to be ashamed of.

“You’ve a pretty look-out here,” said Mr. Fortescue ; “rather better than my father’s bank has, Clare ? What an awful hole it is ! and what dreadful fun being stuck down behind that counter ! I wonder for how long the old gentleman expects me to submit to it .?”

"Do all bankers' clerks rise to be bankers?" asked I, quickly, the vision of that future partnership floating before my eyes.

"Not quite all, I believe," replied Fred, and then the two gentlemen laughed.

"But what *do* they become, then?" I said, feeling vexed.

"My love, they're not caterpillars," answered my husband; "they don't necessarily turn into something different from what they are at first."

"Then, do they always remain clerks on a hundred and twenty pounds a year, even when they become quite old men?"

"I haven't the least idea what becomes of them," remarked young Fortescue, lazily; "but probably, when it has happened, they know themselves."

"Was your father a clerk once?"

"The governor? bless his old heart! Oh, dear, no — never; always a junior partner, or that sort of thing."

"And are you one?"

"I? Am I? Well, that I don't know. If I am, I shall pretty soon cut the concern; but I

opine I am only learning the business. My father is not pleased with me just at the present moment, Mrs. Clare, and thinks it of great importance that I shall form business habits ; so he has put me into the bank *pour passer le temps*, poor old boy ! He expects me to form business habits. What sanguine old birds fathers are !”

“ If you want a *bona fide* bank clerk, my dear,” said Fred, coolly — “ if to produce one is to be the result of your intelligent inquiries—allow me to present him to your notice in the person of Mr. Frederick Clare.”

“ And what ever made you ?” drawled Mr. Fortescue ; “ that’s what I can’t in the least make out. After Cambridge, too. Why, I’ve heard of you from Danvers and Harcourt. What ever made you jump into the governor’s bank ?”

“ A matter of money,” replied Fred, smiling at me.

“ Eh ? What ?” cried the other, catching the meaning of the look. “ Matri-mony—eh ? But weren’t you going into the Church ?”

“ Ah, I gave that up. I didn’t fancy taking orders.”

"I'm thinking of it myself," said Mr. Fortescue, coolly. "There's a fat family living I could step into to-morrow if I felt inclined to be examined by a bishop. But why a bishop? It must be a horrid bore to be examined by a bishop. I'd rather go up to a doctor about a life insurance any day. I say, Clare, you ought to know—do they wear their aprons and lawn sleeves while they do it?"

"Oh, of course, and wigs, too."

"That's nonsense, for they've renounced their wigs. I ascertained *that* the first minute I gave the thing a serious thought; but I can't get over the inconsistency of the aprons and the lawn sleeves—the one so small, and the others so *very* large! That always has stood by me, and always will, and makes me a democrat—at least, as far as bishops are concerned. *Why* are the lawn sleeves so large and the aprons so *very* small? Now, Mrs. Clare, have you the least idea why?"

"I'm sure I don't know," I answered, laughing, "though I think the apron can't be too small, it is so supremely ridiculous."

"That one didn't wear one when he married us," said Fred.

"Oh, yes, he did," replied I; "but he had his robes over it, so that we didn't see it."

"Which was a blessing," said Fred, "as it might have disturbed our weak minds on a solemn occasion."

"Dear me!" cried Mr. Fortescue; "were you married by a bishop?"

"Why not?" asked I.

"Oh, for no particular reason. Don't be alarmed. I believe the ceremony is just as valid, only you must be uncommon great swells—that's all."

We all laughed.

"I was christened by one, too," said I.

"Then I hope you'll live to be buried by one," said Mr. Fortesque, kindly, "and I don't see how you can wish for anything grander than that. And pray, Mrs. Clare, as you are a privileged person, and can inform me, how does the apron look in private life?"

"Just as I said before, supremely ridiculous," I replied.

"Well, it has a great deal to answer for, as, in all human probability, but for that apron I should

have taken orders myself. Think of what a loss the Church has had—think of me in the pulpit, but with the fear before my eyes that one day I might be compelled to wear a bishop's apron. I couldn't do it; upon my life, ma'am, I couldn't do it."

"You might have run such a very small risk, I think," I replied, dryly.

"Very small risk! Why, if I was a curate to-morrow, I couldn't feel secure that they wouldn't make me a bishop next day. They've tolerably snug berths, too, bishops have. If it wasn't for the apron, I don't know that I should mind being one. I don't indeed."

CHAPTER VI.

OUR FIRST QUARREL.

“WELL, Georgy, what do you think of my friend?” said Fred, when we had settled ourselves comfortably, after Mr. Fortescue had taken his leave.

“I don’t think he is your friend,” I replied, a little disdainfully.

“Dear me ! why not ? Is he my foe, then ?”

“No ; in my opinion he is your acquaintance.”

“Oh, but it is a *façon de parler* to call our acquaintances friends.”

“Is it ? It is not a good one, then. I would not call any one my friend whom I did not like dearly.”

“And you don’t like Fortescue dearly.”

“No,” said I, laughing ; “do you ?”

“Well, I’m not romantic and sentimental as

you are. I don't think about friendship ; but I consider him a capital fellow, and am delighted to have made his acquaintance."

"He is an agreeable man, certainly."

"But you have not taken a fancy to him?"

"No, I don't think I have. I fancy I couldn't trust him."

"My dear child, who wants you to trust him?"

"But have *you* taken a fancy to him, Fred?"

"Yes, I have. I like him uncommonly ; and to tell you the truth, little Georgy, the bank is a beastly slow place, and I feel as if I'd fallen on my feet to have him in it."

"Well, Fred, I'm glad you have got him, then ; and I own he's lively and pleasant, with plenty to say, and we can have him to tea now and then, if you like, only—"

"Only what, my oracle?"

"I hardly know, but I really don't want you to make a friend of him, Fred."

"Ah, Georgy, I'm hardly in a position for that now. I am his equal—really, perhaps, his superior. That wasn't all nonsense he talked about our being swells. He was struck by our knowing

bishops ; but here I am his inferior, and it's very unlikely he'll want to make a friend of *me* ; probably he has plenty of companions in his own set, and would not pick one out from his father's clerks."

"That's nonsense, Fred. Of course he'd like to make a friend of you if you'll let him—anybody would ; and as for him, why you're as superior to him, in everything of consequence, as an emperor is to a chimney-sweep." I spoke all in a glow, but Fred only laughed at me, and said it would be well for him if everybody looked on him with his wife's eyes.

A few days passed over in the same pleasant manner. I had been more than once to talk and read to the poor blind woman, and on one occasion I met Miss Gibbons at her house, and she walked back with me to my lodgings. We had a cordial conversation, and I felt that our acquaintance had improved a good deal. Towards the end of our talk, I asked her if she knew young Mr. Fortescue, the banker's son ? She replied in the affirmative, but looked grave, and said he had given his father a good deal of trouble.

"He was very intimate in our house," she said, "at one time, but we seldom see him now."

I told Fred this when he came home, but he only laughed, and replied, "Old maid's rubbish."

Every day he had more and more to tell me about "Jack Fortescue," and seemed to like him better and better. I felt a little vexed at his saying this about Miss Gibbons, whom I thought so well of; and I told him quite seriously, that speaking in that way of the opinion of a sensible woman, merely because she had not happened to marry, was a vulgarity quite unworthy of him.

He opened his eyes, and asked me how I felt myself after making a remark of that kind; upon which I called him a goose, gave him a kiss, and added that I never felt better in my life.

"Or looked better either, you little vixen," said Fred.

After that we sat down to dinner.

"Don't you want money yet to pay for all these things?" asked my husband.

We had fish, a chicken, and some mutton-chops on the table.

"No," I replied. "I have agreed with the

tradespeople to pay every month. It is much the best plan, being less trouble ; and, also, I shall be able to judge better what we ought to spend ; a week is such a little bit of time we can judge nothing by it, but a month is different—we can really form an opinion in a month. My idea is to do things prudently, but also comfortably, and then when the bills come in we shall see if we can go on with it."

"And we shall have had a month's comfortable dinners, at any rate," said he, laughing. "You do provide uncommonly nice dinners, Georgy. They don't do it half so well at home."

"I rather think, from all Pincher used to tell me, that the things are—perhaps—a little *too* common at the rectory—a joint and a plain pudding every day—I should get so tired of them. Now I expect our little bit of fish, and two dishes of something nice, and meat besides, does not cost nearly so much in the long run as their joint and plain pudding."

"Perhaps not," said Fred, doubtfully ; "but then, you know, they have nine or ten to provide for, and we have only two."

"Yes," said I candidly ; "that *does* make a difference. I never thought of *that*."

After dinner it was actually raining. I believe it was the first time it had rained since we came to Lynford, and it seemed to me at once cruel and impossible that the weather should prevent our spending the evening out of doors, and interfere with the perfect enjoyment to which we were accustomed. However, so it was ; and though it partially held up after a time, it was too wet for me to go out.

"I will get my work, and you shall read to me," I said.

"All right."

"But I have just recollected such a thing. You are always so thirsty when you read aloud, and I forgot altogether to buy tea this morning. There is not a grain in the house."

"Never mind, I'll drink bitter beer instead, and make a merit of it."

"And what am I to do?"

"I beg your pardon, I'm sure ; but I thought you said it was *I* who was so thirsty when I read aloud."

"Yes, so you are ; but, notwithstanding that, I like to have a cup of tea."

"I'll tell you what, Georgy, I'll run into the town and get some tea, and smoke my cigar at the same time. I haven't had a smoke to-day ; and what's falling now is hardly to be called rain."

"Very well. Buy it at Gregg's and get a pound, for a pound lasts a very short time. Do you think soldiers have a pound of tea a day as well as a pound of meat ?"

"Do you lock the caddy, dear ?"

"I used to at first, but somehow I can't find the key anywhere."

"Ah, I've a notion that keys in lodging-houses, especially tea-caddy keys, very often are not to be found anywhere."

"But I don't see what that has to do with our drinking so much tea ; for if the caddy was locked it would make no difference. I should unlock it just the same, morning and evening."

"Oh, Georgy, Georgy ! it's wonderful that such beautiful brown eyes as yours, should have such a lot of green in them."

“What do you mean?”

“Where’s my hat? I’ve not time to tell you my meaning now. Cogitate on the remark during my absence, and see if, before my return, you can discover the connection between the three given facts—the loss of the key of the tea-caddy, the short time that the tea kept within that caddy lasts, and the large amount of green in your beautiful brown eyes.”

He ran down the stairs and out of the house as he spoke, and I stood at the window and watched his figure as it retreated down the street, and was at last lost to sight; for when he turned the corner into High Street, I, of course, saw him no longer. My delighted thoughts went with him, and then returned to me dancing with joy. Dear Fred, what haste I knew he would make, how anxious he was to return to me. He dearly loved our evenings spent together—he grudged every hour of the day that he had to stay in the bank away from me. I wondered whether any husband ever before loved his wife just as my Fred loved me, wishing so to be always with her, and not able to enjoy anything unless she was by his

side. Now, I knew just how he would run into Gregg's and bring the tea, and then come home to me, only staying out long enough to smoke his one cigar ; and though we could not take our ramble, an evening spent in the house together would be quite a pleasant novelty, and it was delightful to think that he enjoyed this domestic life to the full as much as I did.

Indulging in these agreeable thoughts, half-an-hour sped quickly away. Half-an-hour ! He had, of course, been much longer than it would take him to go to Gregg's, make his purchase, and return home again. That could be done in half the half-hour ; but then he wished to smoke his after-dinner cigar. Now, he could not do that comfortably in much less than half-an-hour. Still, I began to wonder that his figure did not appear at the corner of the street, for by this time he must have finished his cigar, and after that what was there that could keep him ? Perhaps he had gone into the stationer's on his way home to buy some envelopes I had mentioned at breakfast that I wanted, and he might be looking at the newspapers and magazines they took in

there, intending to bring one to me. Our dinner had been rather later than usual, owing to one of the accidents that occasionally befell Mrs. Crumpledum's cooking, and the evening was closing in—it was now almost eight o'clock. Fred had been gone more than an hour, and I had gradually become nervous, frightened, desperate. Eight o'clock was our tea-hour. Martha put the tea-things on the table, and stood there holding the great black kettle in her hand, till I was obliged to leave the window and make the tea, for, after all, I found a spoonful or two in the caddy. Then I returned to my watch again, and strained my eyes looking out in the one direction. No Fred! What could it mean? I could bear it no longer: so I hastily put my hat on, and, though it was still raining a little, I ran out and followed Fred's steps up the High Street, and into the grocer's shop. There I spoke with the most unconcerned air I could command.

“Has Mr. Clare been here?”

“Yes, ma'am—more than an hour ago. He bought some tea, and went down the hill again.”

I really was horribly frightened. What *could*

have happened? Still, from some feeling or instinct I did not like to betray what I felt. So I merely said—"You didn't happen to see where he went? There is something I want to tell him."

"Mr. Clare, ma'am?" said the shop-boy, who was just going outside to put up the shutters, and overheard my question. "He went into Davidson's when he left here."

Davidson's was the stationer's shop and small library—the only one Lynsford boasted. So I immediately left the grocer's, and moving on with that sort of stunned feeling which reminds one of a dream, and which so often accompanies a state of suspense, and, I suppose, renders suspense bearable, I walked down to Davidson's.

"Is Mr. Clare here?" I asked, and my voice surprised me, it sounded to me so unlike my own.

"No, ma'am," was the only answer.

"Has he been here?" I faintly demanded.

The master of the shop spoke over his shoulder to a man in the rooms behind, "Has Mr. Clare been here, Jem?"

"He left better nor half-an-hour since," came

the answer from the back shop. "Young Master Fortescue took him into the billiard-rooms, and they've been knocking of the balls about ever since."

I felt as if I was, indeed, in a dream. It could not be *my* Fred they were talking about—spending his evening with idle companions in billiard-rooms, and leaving his wife neglected and alone. I had read of such things in books, but how little had I ever thought I should experience them myself when I married—for love! My heart stood still for a moment, and then with a great bound resumed its beating, while I felt the color rush into my cheeks and the tears into my eyes. It was a great trial; and I don't think I had ever had a trial in my life before, so that I did not in the least know how to bear it, or even what to do with it. I am thankful that I had power to command myself, and not to betray in Mr. Davidson's shop any part of what I was feeling. I dropped the veil over my face, and said, stoutly, "Thank you—that's right then. He didn't leave any parcel for me?" as if it was all just what I had expected, and having quietly listened to the

civil negative with which the question was met, I walked rapidly home. My thoughts were all in a whirl, and I did not give myself an instant's time to steady or examine them. I must just get home—that was all I cared for: home—away from people's eyes, and where I could allow myself to think and feel; for out here in the street I did not dare to do either. The rain fell heavily now, but I did not heed it, and though I carried an umbrella in my hand, it never occurred to me that it would be a good plan to put it up.

At last I reached my own hall door, and running up-stairs hastily, found myself in the drawing-room—alone? No—not alone! There was Fred, just coming out of the bed-room, and looking actually frightened.

“Why, Georgy! he exclaimed; “Georgy! where have you been?”

“Where have *you* been? I might rather ask,” answered I, in a very cold, high manner.

“I have been searching for you everywhere, and you really frightened me. How could you be so silly as to go out in the rain?”

"It was dull here by myself," I replied, in the same manner.

My husband looked at me curiously.

"Dull ? But, my dear little goose, you wouldn't go out in a pouring rain because you found it dull in the house."

"It wasn't raining much when I went out."

Fred whistled a little, very softly.

"Shall we have tea ?" asked he.

"It is long past the tea-time. Do you know what o'clock it is ?"

He took out his watch and examined it carefully.

"Five minutes past nine."

"And you went out at half-past six."

"Oh, no, I'm sure I did not. It was seven or eight at least. Don't you remember how late dinner was ?"

"I can't help that ; it was exactly half-past six when you went out."

Fred made no reply, except by pouring out a cup of tea, and bringing it to me. I took off my wet hat and scarf, and, sitting down, sipped the tea, but I neither looked at him nor spoke to

him, and did not in the least relax from the dry stiffness of my manner, though all the time it was with the greatest possible difficulty I kept from bursting out crying.

"Shall I read you something after tea, Georgy?" asked he at last.

"It will be too late."

"Too late? Why, how long do you mean to be drinking tea, and how early do you intend going to bed?"

"It doesn't in the least signify."

"What doesn't signify?"

"Nothing," cried I, hastily.

"Nothing signifies? Dear me, Georgy, why not?"

"I think you were dreadfully unkind," said I, unable to conceal my thoughts any longer, "to spend all the evening playing billiards."

"Oh, come now. I didn't spend all the evening playing billiards; only a little bit of it."

"Yes, you did. I suppose it seemed only a little bit of it, because you were happy"—the word came out with a sort of sob—"but it was nearly three hours."

"Oh, now, it wasn't, nothing of the sort, and it was really very silly of you to go running about the town after me."

"I didn't go running about the town after you. You oughtn't to say such a thing, Fred. I was very much frightened—anybody would have been frightened ; you went out to buy some tea, and you never came back again, and that was enough to frighten anybody. What could have happened to you ? There was *nothing* that could have happened, and yet you didn't come back. How could anybody help being frightened at *that* ?" said I, piteously.

"There would have been more reason if anything *could* have happened."

"No, there wouldn't ; that's nonsense."

"You contradict every word I say."

"You shouldn't say that I ran about the town after you. The minute I knew where you were I came home."

"But why did you go out at all ? Mayn't a man have a game of billiards with a friend without all this rout when he comes home ?"

"Oh, how unkind, how very, *very* unkind you

are. You actually don't *see* that you shouldn't have done it—that you shouldn't spend your evenings playing billiards without even telling me what you meant to do ; so that I was frightened, too. I wouldn't have believed it if anybody had told me you *could* be so unkind."

"But I didn't know I was going to do it. I didn't mean to do it. Fortescue and I got talking, and I told him of a stroke I had made, and he defied me to make it again, and so we just went in for a minute, and I did it ; and then we laid wagers about things, and so we got playing, and I hadn't the least idea how time past—I give you my word I hadn't."

"Because you liked it so ; and I was all alone, and so frightened. I shouldn't have been frightened, only it never occurred to me—oh no, not for a moment—that you *liked* leaving me, and were passing a pleasant evening," and here again I couldn't repress a little sob.

"But I didn't—I didn't mean to do it ; and I like being with you better than anything else—you know I do ; and I'm sure I got no good by being out to-night ; I lost thirty shillings."

"I wouldn't care if you had lost thirty pounds. What I care for is that I'm afraid—I'm afraid. Oh, Fred, could you have stayed playing billiards when you left me only for a minute, if you loved me so very, *very* much as I thought you did?" and here I burst into a flood of tears. My husband clasped me in his arms.

"Yes, darling, I could, because I did, and I do," he cried, kissing away my tears. "I was a horrid brute to do it, Georgie. Men *are* horrid brutes; but you *know* I love you better than my life, and that it was only want of thought, and that I'd rather be with you than with forty kings all playing billiards."

"Oh, Fred," I cried, returning his caresses, "*don't* be a horrid brute again."

"No, darling, I won't," cried he, seriously. "Never again, as long as I live."

Upon this I freely forgave him; and then it occurred to me to say, "And dearest Fred, if I was cross, you won't mind, will you? I was so MISERABLE." He only replied by kisses, and so ended our first quarrel.

CHAPTER VII.

EVERY-DAY LIFE.

AFTER this we settled quietly down into every-day life, and I think we were both of us equally determined that our first quarrel should be our last. Every-day life? Yes ; but it was the every-day life of two young lovers, in which each word is a joy, and the commonest event a pleasure. As separate leaves and trivial blades of grass, assume an exquisite beauty when the sun shines brightly upon them, so did the most unimportant things appear beautiful to us, illumined as they were by the sunshine of our love. Halcyon days ! exquisite in possession—more exquisite when looked back on in the sorrowful time to which these flowery paths were bringing us.

It seems very strange, but, with all our planning and talking, our determination to be econo-

mical and to keep regular accounts, we were *not* good managers. We did not even keep the regular accounts, for we both of us forgot to put down what we had spent during the day—not always, but, I am sorry to say, very often ; so, at the end of the first month, what with the comfortable dinners, the number of extra things I found it necessary to buy that I had never thought of till the necessity presented itself, the hiring the piano which Fred had sent in, flowers he bought for a flower-stand in the window, and a flower-stand which it immediately became evident, he must buy for the flowers, books and newspapers and magazines, and a variety of other articles I don't remember at this minute—what with all these things, at the end of the first month it was only too true that I found we had expended nearer a fourth than a twelfth part of our income.

It had been a delightful month, and the month that followed was equally charming, although during it we were both of us trying harder than ever to be economical, and trying to be economical is not usually an agreeable thing ; but we made a joke of it, and though that might not be the best

way of carrying out the desired end, it made the means employed extremely cheerful, instead of being rather dismal.

There seemed to be very little society in Lynsford—very little, at least, that took any notice of us ; but, as I have said before, we did not want society, we were so happy in each other. We drank tea at the clergyman's, and dined at the doctor's, and at the clergyman's we met the doctor and his wife, and at the doctor's we met the clergyman and *his* wife ; but the parties were not brilliant, and the pleasantest part of them was the return home again, and finding ourselves once more in our own little sitting-room ; and Miss Gibbon and I exchanged visits now and then, and I went to see the poor blind woman. Mr. Fortescue was our only intimate. He often called of an evening and had tea with us, and I did not find I got particularly fond of him ; but Fred said he was an excellent fellow, and that his company transformed the bank into a different place, and he thought he could make up his mind to remain there as long as it was lit by the light of Jack Fortescue's countenance.

"He mayn't be just exactly a solemn swell," he explained when I was speaking, perhaps a little disdainfully, of the banker's son; "but it's so pleasant, you see, Georgy. He tells the other fellows to mind the business, if the governor's out, you know; and then off we go and get a game of billiards, or stretch our legs with a walk, and nobody one bit the wiser, for the other fellows know better than to tell tales of their master's son; and he is very liberal among them, and gets them leave when he can; and so he is popular, and as his friend I come in for popularity, too, and they look up to me no end—they do, I assure you, Georgy."

"Of course they do," was my reply; "only I don't suppose it's for Mr. Jack Fortescue's sake they look up to you, but for your own."

"Why should they look up to me for *that*?" said Fred, quietly.

"Why, because of what you are," cried I.

"But what am I?" persisted he.

"O!" cried I, and I felt that a world of meaning was expressed in that single letter of the alphabet.

"I'm just one of their fellow-clerks," said Fred contentedly, "and they didn't consider me one bit better than themselves ; and the chief-clerk *looked* snubs at me, if he didn't *speak* them—haven't I longed to punch his head many a time—till the prince came and smiled upon me, when the world became bright, as worlds always do under the smiles of princes."

"Such nonsense !" cried I, indignantly, "when you are so much better than he."

"As how?" inquired Fred, quietly.

"As every how—in all things, and in all ways. Don't be absurd, Fred ; you must know it yourself, and are only going on to provoke me."

"Am I going on?" said Fred. "Well, now, do you know, I thought it was you."

"You're better looking—you've better manners—you're more gentlemanly—and as to mind, and heart, and character, he's not fit to hold a candle to you."

"How *I am* going on !" said Fred ; "but isn't it melancholy to think, Georgy, how other men's wives talk about *me*?"

"How? Why? What?" cried I. "What can anybody's wife say against *you*?"

"Why, telling their husbands that I'm inferior to them in everything, and in heart, and mind, and character, not fit to hold a candle to them, you know."

"But they don't!"

"Oh, don't they, really? And are you the only one, then?"

"Of course I am, you foolish boy; and I say it, not because I'm your wife, but because it's TRUE."

"How extremely nice!" said Fred; "and do you know, I hadn't the least idea of it."

It was at the end of the second month that I was sitting alone in my little drawing-room balancing accounts preparatory to paying the bills, and was astonished and dismayed to find, on examining the various things, how many items I had forgotten to enter, and how much I had again exceeded our means. Just then there was a tap at the door, and when I said "Come in," Mr. Jack Fortescue entered the room.

"Oh, I beg pardon, I'm sure," said he, "you're busy, I see, and I thought Clare was here."

"Pray, come in ; he will be at home soon, and very happy to see you."

"Thanks, but I'm in a deuce of a hurry ; I am, indeed. I've got to catch the post, and I did want to see him for a minute first."

"But why did you leave the bank then ? He must be there now ; it's not quite time for him to come home yet."

"I left the bank hours ago. I couldn't stay. The fact is, Mrs. Clare, I'm bothered to death—I really am—and I thought Clare would help me, he's such a good fellow."

"He is always ready to help people," I replied, with dignity.

"Yes ; that's just what I say. There's nobody like Clare for helping people—and—and all that sort of thing ; is there now, Mrs. Clare ? and that's just why I hoped to find him now."

"If you can wait"—I began, but he shook his head.

"Impossible—quite impossible ! I haven't a minute."

"Perhaps, then, I can give him a message ?"

"But the post ! I'm in no end of a scrape ; I

am, indeed, and I don't know what I shall do if I can't get it before the post goes out."

"Get it? What? Is it anything of yours Fred has got? I dare say I can find it."

"Oh, didn't I tell you? I thought I had explained. Didn't I really, though? It isn't anything of that sort; it's a mere trifle, and he's so good-natured. I wanted five pounds just for a day or two, but I wanted it in a deuce of a hurry."

"If that's all," said I, taking a five-pound note from the top compartment of the desk I had been writing at, in which a good deal of our money was kept, "pray, take this."

I felt myself blushing a good deal as I offered it to him; but Mr. Jack Fortescue's color was not in the slightest degree heightened as he took the five-pound note.

"Thanks," he said, dropping it negligently into his waistcoat pocket, with as much coolness as if it was the commonest every-day occurrence for me to supply him with five-pound notes. "Really so much obliged—ta, ta! I won't detain you any longer now;" and, smiling benignly on me, he

sauntered out of the room, not at all like a man who was in a violent hurry to save the post.

As soon as Mr. Fortescue had left me, I returned to my calculations, and my head grew hot and my feet cold as I discovered how much money I had spent.

Very soon after this Fred ran in, but I did not receive him as joyfully as usual.

"Oh, Fred," I cried, "we are still exceeding our income horribly. I spend too much in house-keeping, and you do buy such a lot of things we never reckoned on."

"What a bore it is!" said Fred.

"Yes, but we *mustn't* do it, Fred."

"Oh, no; I suppose we mustn't, if we can any way know how not."

I couldn't help laughing at his way of expressing himself, though the minute before I had felt more ready to cry than to laugh.

"It is *very* disagreeable saving," said I.

"Do you speak from experience? I hadn't a notion we had done *that*."

"Oh, you know what I mean—*trying* to save,

trying not to spend money, and to live within our means."

"I'll tell you what's more disagreeable, Georgy."

"Pray, do ; for I can't imagine anything that is."

"Seeing all that gold and silver up there in the bank, shovelling it out, living among it, longing for it, and never getting a penny of it."

"Oh, Fred, don't say *that*."

"But it is, Georgy. You can't think how I long to handle it sometimes."

"Nonsense, Fred. I know you don't, but still I can't bear to hear you say it."

"But I do ; and I believe I might fill my pockets with it, and nobody be a bit the wiser."

"I do wish you wouldn't say such horrid things, though, of course, I know quite well you are joking."

"I'm not joking the least bit in the world."

"Well, don't say so, then," replied I, quite crossly, for he had once or twice talked in this strain, and I could not bear to hear him. He laughed, stretched himself, yawned, and kissed me.

"Shut up those tiresome documents, darling, and don't mind them any more. Your cheeks are flushed, and your eyes have a worried look in them I don't like to see. We'll tackle to the work together, and see how we can manage to spend less, for we mustn't get into debt if we can help it. I have been brought up with a holy horror of debt."

"I forgot to tell you that Mr. Fortescue called just before you came in, and asked me to lend him five pounds."

"Nonsense!"

"He did indeed."

"Asked you to lend him five pounds! What an abominably shabby fellow to borrow money from a woman."

"I don't think it was so shabby. He had intended to ask you for it, and my giving it was just the same thing."

"No, it wasn't; he oughtn't to have taken it from you."

"I can't see that, Fred. He said he was going to borrow it from you, so I gave it him. It really seemed the most natural thing in the world."

"Well—it might ; but for all that I think it's an uncommonly shabby thing for a man to find a girl at a desk in a drawing-room, and borrow five pounds of her."

I laughed heartily at the emphasis he laid on the "desk in the drawing-room."

"And I'll tell you what, Georgy, it's not the first five-pound note Mr. Jack Fortescue has had from me."

I opened my eyes wide.

"Isn't it really, Fred?"

"No, it isn't—nor the second, nor the third. It's just twenty pounds he owes me."

"Oh, Fred, you don't mean it? Has he borrowed all this from you and never paid you?"

Fred nodded his head.

"What a shame!"

"The shame is, his asking *you* ; and the more I think of it the less I like it. Don't do it again, Georgy."

"But, my dear Fred, if we've lent him twenty pounds, and spent all this lot of money besides, what *are* we to do? I really believe we shall be IN DEBT!"

Fred brushed his curly brown hair up with his fingers, till it stood nearly erect on his head, as he was in the habit of doing if perplexed or puzzled, and replied, "I really believe we shall."

"And then—what are we to do?"

"I must help myself from the shovels of gold and silver, I suppose."

"*Don't* talk so, Fred; you only do it to worry me, I know, because I told you not; but if you knew *how* much I hate it, you wouldn't, I'm sure."

"Very well, dear, I won't."

"That's a good boy. But what shall we do, then?"

"First of all, we'll eat our dinners; *you* gormandize on cakes, you know, in the middle of the day; but *I* get nothing, and so—I'm hungry; and then after dinner we'll tackle to those troublesome accounts—you and I together—and see if with our two wise heads we cannot discover some way of escaping from our present difficulties, and avoiding similar ones in future."

"Yes," said I, doubtfully; "I suppose that will be the best plan, only it *is* all so disagreeable."

"In short, Georgy, you are beginning to repent having married a poor man."

"Oh, Fred, Fred!" and I was in his arms in a minute. I saw by his dear smile that he was only in joke; but I felt keenly that any word of complaint from me might have the appearance of my being discontented with my lot—I, the happiest woman in England, discontented with the lot of being Fred's wife!

The idea had never occurred to me before. When two people who really love each other are married, in my opinion they become so entirely ONE, that I am apt to forget they were once *two*, and had the choice given them of joining their lives together; or that in after years one or other of them may regret that they did not take advantage of the power of choosing and remain *two*. Of course, he or she who felt thus could never really have loved; for true love is unchangeable, and in it no room for repentance ever can be found. But, alas! marriages are sometimes made without true love, and sometimes, even, people deceive themselves, and fancy that is true love which is only a passing fancy. How sad, how inexpressi-

bly sad, it is that it should be so ; but so it is. And we must take the world as we find it.

We sat down together to our task, and while we perseveringly plodded our way through the somewhat intricate accounts, we made our mutual confessions. I saw that I must have been extravagant, however little I either wished or intended it, and that I had bought many things we could have perfectly well done without ; and Fred blamed himself greatly for having played billiards for money, and lost at that fascinating game so many half-crowns that they amounted to some pounds. We made many promises of amendment, and finally we determined to be prudent, and even self-denying in future, if we found self-denial was actually necessary.

"Of course, it is not pleasant to deny ourselves," said I ; "nobody pretends that it is ; but if it is a DUTY, we must do it, and even *self-denial* must be nicer than getting into such a muddle as *this*," and I made a disdainful sign at the heap of papers that lay before us.

"Perhaps it is," replied Fred, doubtfully ; "but I'm afraid we mustn't mind about pleasant. It

must be done, unless we wish to go to jail (which I don't suppose we do), whether it is pleasant or not."

"We must eat joints," said I, "and never stop till we've eaten them all up, like that horrid sirloin of beef we began with ; and we'll get Australian mutton and salt fish, and everything else we can think of that's cheap. I do believe there will be a sort of pleasure in it. There is in anything one takes up heartily."

"Rather a dismal sort of pleasure, won't it? But we can save in a great many little things, I see," said Fred, who was looking over the bills, "and it's those little things, though you mayn't think it, that make just the difference between living economically or extravagantly. Now look here—candles. You give a shilling a pound for candles. At home they never give more than eightpence halfpenny."

I was foolish enough not quite to like this comparison of the two households, so I said, a trifle coldly, "I thought this was home."

"Well, well, I mean at my father's."

"But that is only threepence halfpenny a

pound !—too small a difference to signify ; there cannot be any use looking at such things as *that*. We must save in more important things.”

“I beg your pardon. If we saved threepence halfpenny a pound on everything, we should find a pretty considerable difference at the end of the year.”

“Oh, Fred, you’ll never live within your income if you set about it in that way.”

“‘Take care of the pennies and the pounds will take care of themselves.’”

“I hate proverbs ; they are not arguments.”

“They arise from the result of arguments.”

“Anybody could make a proverb to prove anything, and in reality they prove nothing whatever.”

“They are founded on the wisdom and experience of ages.”

“I hate wisdom and experience.”

“Listen, nevertheless, to a little of mine. My mother gives eightpence halfpenny a pound for candles ; you give a shilling ; very well. Let us suppose, for the sake of argument, that you use one pound of candles a week each of you. Ac-

cording to this calculation, you spend on candles in the course of a year two pounds twelve shillings, and she spends one pound sixteen shillings and tenpence, therefore your expenditure exceeds hers by fifteen shillings and twopence ; and though threepence halfpenny may be a sum not worth mentioning, fifteen shillings, you will admit, makes a tolerably large hole in one of those sovereigns, of which we have only one hundred and seventy for our yearly income."

"How quick you did it !" was my sole reply ; and then I added, "I really will take to studying arithmetic. Every housekeeper ought to know it, and it gives such a sense of power, doing sums in one's head in that way."

"Study arithmetic by all means ; but before you begin, please admit that my statement about our giving too much for candles is correct."

"Oh, yes, I see *that* ; but I wonder how you came to think of such things, Fred."

"From having been a member of a large family where economy was necessary, the heads of the house prudent, and ways and means openly discussed."

"You know a great deal more about it all than I do."

"Yes, and my theories are excellent ; but I am ashamed of myself that my practice has fallen so short of them. I thought as little as a much more ignorant person might have done of the money I lost at billiards. I had no business to play."

"I suppose you were always expecting to win ?"

"Yes ; and I am passionately fond of the game. I could play billiards for ever."

"No, you couldn't ; not unless I played with you. You'd get tired of it very soon without me—you know you would."

"Oh, yes ; I know I should, of course."

"But, Fred, do you know I *can* play billiards ?"

"You don't say so ! Why, what a great woman you are, to be sure !"

"You may laugh, but I've played them often at the Manor, and Colonel Milman said I was the best lady player there."

"You are the best lady anything anywhere."

"Very well. That being settled, then, in a

satisfactory manner for all parties, don't you think we might get a *little* bit of a walk, late as it is ? There is *such* a moon shining."

"Quite a new sort of a moon, I suppose. Very well, we'll go, by all means ; put on your hat, darling, and I'll tumble all these troublesome little bits of papers into your desk ; we've had enough business for one day—have not we ?"

"*Quite* enough," I replied, earnestly ; and so we went out for one of our enchanting moonlight walks.

On the bridge where I had seen him for the first time, we found Mr. Jack Fortescue smoking a cigar.

"Hullo !" he cried, "lovers by moonlight. I beg your pardon, Mrs. Clare, but the words seem so very appropriate."

"It is a fine evening," I replied, rather coldly. He withdrew his cigar from his mouth.

"I suppose you are not allowed this little luxury ?" he said to Fred.

"Yes, he is," I cried quickly.

Fred laughed.

"I don't allow *myself* more than one a day, and

I have had my treat already. Cigars are rather expensive articles, Fortescue."

"I know that to my cost, or, rather, the governor knows it to *his* cost. What's the use of fathers except to pay your debts?"

"That's not the use of *my* father," muttered Fred, grimly.

"And so you really smoke only one cigar a day? I never use less than fifteen."

"I'm sure it is nothing to boast of," I cried.

"I'm much better since I gave up smoking," said Fred, candidly, "mind and body."

"And I'm much better since I took to it," said Mr. Fortescue, "mind and body also."

"What *can* they have been before?" said I, softly, and in the politest possible manner.

Fred laughed; but I thought Mr. Jack Fortescue did not look quite pleased.

"How exquisite that moonlight on the water is; there's nothing so beautiful on earth," cried I.

"It isn't on earth," said Fred.

"Didn't I say so?" replied I, coolly. "I *said* there was nothing so beautiful on earth."

"I stand corrected."

"Yes, dear ; I wouldn't try that sort of thing if I were you. But do look at the flood of moonlight on that big ship—is it big, I wonder ?—or does it only look so in the moonlight ?"

"It *is* big," said Mr. Fortescue. "It's an Australian vessel put in here for something or other—some repairs wanted, I fancy."

It seemed to me at that moment that Fred and he exchanged a significant look. I felt quite startled, but then I thought it was some deceptive effect of the moonlight. There could be no private understanding between my Fred and this new acquaintance : it was only with *me* Fred was likely to exchange significant looks.

"How would you like to go to Australia, Mrs. Clare ?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Not at all," I replied instantly. "I have not the least fancy for an emigrant's life."

"There are worse lives, though," said Fred. "I think it would be rather jolly."

"A man might do worse," said Mr. Fortescue.

"But a woman couldn't," cried I.

"Then you wont accompany me to Australia when I go there ?" said Fred.

"Certainly not."

"Then I must go by myself, I suppose?"

"There is a better alternative," laughed I, "and a simpler one—that you don't go at all."

"Few men would *wish* to exile themselves from home, and country, and friends," said Mr. Fortescue, and it seemed to me he spoke rather gloomily, "yet not a few *have* to do it."

And again, to my amazement, I intercepted, or fancied I intercepted, a meaning look exchanged between him and my husband. I indignantly refused to believe I had seen aright. I rubbed my eyes, glanced at the moon, and accused first the one and then the other of misleading me. The moon cast flickering and uncertain rays all around me. Suddenly the joy with which the beauty of her light had filled my heart changed into fear, and a strange, new sense of the uncertainty of all things seized hold of me, while an irrepressible, though slight, shiver ran over my frame.

"Are you cold, love?" cried Fred, with the utmost tenderness.

"Oh, yes," I said, and my voice sounded in my own ears with a plaintive meaning. "Let us go

in, the moonlight is so cold and so uncertain." And with difficulty I repressed my tears, though I felt they would have been the most senseless and uncalled-for I had ever shed.

The bright light, and cheerful aspect of our little sitting-room dispelled in a moment my silly, unreasonable fancies; but I still found myself saying very earnestly to my husband, "Oh, Fred, I don't like that man."

"It is so odd of you, darling; why is it, I wonder? What is there about the poor fellow you don't like?"

"I don't *trust* him," I said, instantly; but when they were spoken the words surprised myself, for I had had no vivid consciousness till I *heard* the words that they expressed my feeling towards Mr. Jack Fortescue; and then I saw plainly that they did express it, and that no others could do so.

CHAPTER VIII.

OUR FIRST PARTY.

IT was at breakfast the next morning that I informed Fred that we ought very soon to give a party.

I never saw a man more unaffectedly astonished in my life.

"Give a *what*?" he said, putting down his knife and fork, and staring at me.

"A party."

"What's that?" said he, speaking so slowly that both the words seemed made of two or three syllables.

"We must ask our neighbors to drink tea with us."

"She really means it, and I did not suppose it possible!" sighed Fred.

"But why not?" I asked, calmly. "Does it not

appear to you, as it does to me, the simplest and most natural thing in the world ?”

“No !” cried he, stoutly ; “it appears to me fearfully complicated and utterly unnatural.”

“We must ask the Simpers and the Goldneys, because they have asked us. It is always done, and we must do it.”

“I assure you that my father and mother”—— began Fred.

“That has nothing to do with it,” replied I, very shortly. “They are clergymen, and it is not expected from clergymen, but it *is* from everybody else in the world, or they are thought very mean, indeed. You don’t want to be mean, Fred ?”

“No, I don’t want to be mean,” he answered, meekly.

“Very well, then, we must give a party.”

“I suppose we must, if you say so.”

“And have the Simpers and the Goldneys.”

“To dinner, of course ?”

“Good gracious ! no. How *could* we have them to dinner with Mrs. Crumpledum’s cooking and Martha’s waiting ? What a horrible notion !”

"But that will be very mean," answered Fred ;
"for we *dined* at the doctor's."

"Let us distinguish. A young couple in lodgings are not expected to give dinners. They may receive whatever sort of hospitality it suits their neighbors to offer them, and then make the best return they can."

"Oh, may they ?" said he. "That's a blessing. Anything more ?"

"More what ?"

"I hardly know—lessons, aphorisms, epitaphs, dirges—whatever those little things are you are so kindly trying to teach me," replied Fred, very mournfully.

"Don't be a goose, dear, but help me to settle everything. We must ask the people who have asked us, and I think we must hire a waiter, and have a few things from the hotel."

"You *have* settled it, rather, my love. In what am I to help you ?"

"Why *are* you so tiresome, Fred ? Why *wont* you talk it over nicely ? What's the matter ?"

"I thought I was talking it over very nicely indeed—that is to say, letting *you* talk, while I

listened with respectful attention. Isn't that a wife's notion of talking things over with her husband ? ”

“ Oh, well, if you wont, you wont, and there's no use in my trying to make you.”

“ Yes, but I will, and there is. Look here, Georgy—this party, the way you are planning it, will cost no end of money.”

“ My *dear* Fred, what nonsense ! It *can* only cost a few shillings.”

“ Oh yes, indeed, but it can, and will, too ; and really and truly, Georgy, we are getting—we have *got*—into difficulties, and we must draw in.”

“ But can we never do anything, then ? Oh, Fred, it *is* trying ! ”

“ My darling, I am so sorry. Well, then, this one party, I suppose, we must give, any way you like, only we mustn't do it again. We can't hire a man under seven-and-sixpence or half-a-guinea ; and if you attempt a supper, we must, as you say, get it from the hotel, and the thing will cost two or three pounds at the lowest ; so it can be only once in a way, dear Georgy.”

“ Oh, thank you ! Then I may really do it ? I

had been planning it all, and when one plans a thing it gets to seem as if it must happen, and then it's a chill to find it can't ; but I'm so glad it can, and afterwards we'll be as saving and all that as ever you like—you dear, old, cautious Fred !”

My husband shrugged his shoulders, and there was a look of care in his face.

“ You think I *like* the saving, do you, my dear ?” he said, quietly, and then he kissed me as usual, and went out of the room and down the stairs to his work. I had given up walking with him to the bank for a long time, for he discovered that the clerks used to congregate in the window and peep at us through the blinds, and Fred did not fancy that sort of thing at all ; neither did I.

“ Dear fellow,” thought I, when he was gone, “ how nice it is of him letting me do what I like ;” and then, even as I thought it, a pang of remorse, I believe it was, shot through my heart as I recalled that look of care in his dear, boyish face, and the question suddenly stood up before me, so large and distinct, I could not avoid taking it in—“ If he is nice, WHAT are YOU ?”

I rushed to the window just as he issued out of

the door, and tapped violently on it, then threw it open, and cried—"Come back! come back!"

He looked up astonished, smiled, elevated his eyebrows, and obeyed me.

I flew down the stairs, and met him breathlessly just as he had begun to ascend them.

"I wont do it, Fred! Dear Fred, I wont do it!" I held the front of his coat in my hand as I spoke, and looked earnestly into his face.

"Wont you, my love? Very well. What is it!"

"The waiter—the supper. I wont have them—only tea, and Martha."

"Only tea and Martha! Oh, my poor Georgy, what a depth of woe that expresses!"

"Stuff and nonsense!—not a bit of it. I shall *like* it. I'd *rather* do it in the way you wish."

"You darling."

"You see I talked about self-denial. I said we'd deny ourselves if it was a DUTY, and it *was* a duty, and I didn't, I was such a nasty little humbug; but it never occurred to me it was *that*, till just after you were gone."

"I don't like it a bit better than you do, my love."

"You said I was a good girl because I talked, and it was only talk ; but it is not only talk when I come rushing down-stairs to do it—is it, Fred ? I *am* a good girl now, am I not, dear Fred ?"

"The best of good girls," cried he, fondly embracing me ; "and my own darling, besides."

My face was all a-glow, and his cheeks became wet with the tears on mine.

"And never have that look in your eyes again, Fred," I whispered ; "never, never—promise me that you never will."

"What look, my pet ?" said he, astonished.

"That look of *care*—I can think of no other word for it—never have it again, Fred—promise, promise quick."

He laughed.

"I shall have it with sufficient cause," he said, "if you make me much later. Good gracious, Georgy !" glancing at the clock on the stairs, "it's half an hour over the time, and old Grimble always gets a shy at me when he possibly can."

And so we parted with fond kisses, and I went back to the drawing-room to compose myself, and to think over, and over, and over again how good

my husband was, and how earnestly I would try to be a good wife to him.

Then I wrote my little notes of invitation to Mrs. Simper, as we always called her, though her real name was Wilkinson, and to Mrs. Goldney. I should have liked to ask Miss Gibbons also, but, as she had not invited us, I thought it would be taking a liberty, so I abstained from doing so; and then I considered that tea and coffee, with cakes and bread and butter, and afterwards wine and water, and strawberries—plentiful and cheap in the month of July, and I smiled as I recollected my first purchase of that pleasant fruit—would do perfectly well in the provision line; and it would be odd, with so little to do, and so few people, if Martha and Fred and I together could not arrange matters comfortably. Flowers we could always get for a few pence, and the woods on the other side of the river were full of ferns and honeysuckle; so any table and any room could be made pretty. Indeed, my room was *always* full of flowers and leaves, and my table *always* decorated with them, even for our *tête-a-tête* meals. Then, we could have music, and we had a really fine

collection of photographs, a wedding gift from an uncle of mine who lives in Paris ; so the intellectual part of the entertainment would be by no means bad. Altogether, I felt in excellent spirits about the proposed party, and happy, ah, so happy ! that I had yielded my foolish wishes to my husband's wise ones. This was Tuesday, and the party was to be on Thursday ; so there would be plenty of time, and no hurry, before the great event came off.

"That bank is the most abominable place on earth," were Fred's first words when he came home.

"How sorry I am ! What has it done that is wrong now ?"

"That infamous old vagabond, Grimble, had the impudence to snub me when I came in."

"You don't really mean it ?"

"I do, though—confound him."

"You should report him to Mr. Fortescue."

"I'd like to see old Fortescue's face if I did."

"His face of anger against Grimble ?"

"No, his face of amazed contempt at me."

"At *you*, Fred ? How can you say so ? He

never can wish you to submit to such indignities, and would be obliged to you for reporting his head-clerk's irregularities."

"I'm afraid his head-clerk has got more of my irregularities to report than I have of this. He'd go and tell of my frequent unpunctuality, and of my absences without leave, in company with the son and heir."

"But that is no reason why he should be impertinent."

"Of course it's very disgusting, and I should like to punch the old chap's head ; and of course the old chap deserves to have his head punched for making himself disagreeable to me. But still, my love, it's a melancholy fact, that he is only doing what the old chap himself would call his 'dooty,' and that one of the reasons he is put there is to snub me."

"To snub *you* !"

"Alas ! yes, my Georgy, to snub me—even me. At home and at college I was a gentleman ; *here*, I am a king and a hero ; but *there*, I am only a clerk, a very junior clerk, indeed, in a country banking house, with a head-clerk over me who has a

perfect right to snub me if I don't keep my time to a minute."

"Fred, you *must* try to get something else. It's a state of things you can't go on enduring."

"My little wife gave me a lesson in self-denial this morning, and I must do my best to profit by it."

"Dear, dear Fred ! but I had so *much* rather that *you* hadn't to deny yourself in anything."

"Thank you, Georgy. However, seriously, I don't think this banking can go on for ever. I hate it ; and I *am* fit for better things. I shall go in for some competition or other, I think. My education is utterly thrown away in my present life, as I had the honor of remarking to you before ; and now I look back coolly on the past, I'm not surprised at my father being vexed when he thought of all the money he spent on it."

"Do you know, Fred, that always seems to me a low view to take. Professions are not more than men. Your education becomes part of *you* ; it makes you something better and wiser than you were before ; and if you did nothing but sweep streets afterwards, still it would not be thrown away."

"But it would not have made me very good or very wise if I was *content* to do nothing better than sweep streets."

"But you wouldn't be content; and your father should have got you something fit for you when you refused to be a clergyman. Instead of saying your education was thrown away (when you had taken honors and done everything on the face of the earth you could do), he should have admired you and helped you to get some post your education had fitted you for."

"Poor old governor! He's not much given to admiring me, I'm afraid; and as to getting me some swell appointment, how is a quiet country clergyman, who does not move twice a year out of the bounds of his own parish, and has neither money nor connections, to do *that*? No, poor old boy, he did what he could. He choose what he considered a beautiful profession for me, and gave me the best education that can be had in England, and would then have made me his curate; and it was a hard pull on him—it was, indeed, Georgy."

"Of course, he would have liked to have you

for his curate ; *any* rector would have wished *that*."

"What a scrimmage there'd have been among them all if I *had* taken orders !—all the rectors in England struggling for me ! It would have been the Kilkenny cats over again, and only one little bit of clerical fluff left ! In fact, Georgy, it was sheer humanity that really prevented my becoming a curate. I couldn't bear the idea of such a self-inflicted massacre of the innocents as would have been the result."

"That's all very fine, Fred ; but I don't believe I ever shall quite forgive your father for saying your education was thrown away, and I do hope you won't take up the cant yourself."

"Please, dear, what's that ?"

"What's what ? I don't understand you."

"Taking up the cant ? Is it anything in knitting ? I've heard my mother tell of taking up a stitch when she's been knitting my socks. Why, what's the matter, Georgy ? don't beat me, please."

Next day, when Fred returned to dinner, he told me very cheerfully that he had invited Jack Fortescue to "our party ;" and when I said

blankly, "No, you didn't really," he only answered, "Yes, I did ; why shouldn't I ?"

"Very well, then," said I ; "I shall ask old Grimble."

"But why ?" said Fred.

"Why shouldn't I ?" quoted I. "If you ask the clerks at all, you should begin from the top."

"I'm not asking the clerks at all. Jack isn't a clerk, nor considered as a clerk, as you'd see soon enough if you'd the *entrée* to the bank."

"Then I shall ask old Fortescue."

"But why ?" again demanded my husband.

"If you ask the Fortescues at all, you should begin with the father."

"I'll ask him with the greatest pleasure in life—an old humbug ! It would do him no end of good to have one of his subordinates take a liberty with him. But he wouldn't be a very agreeable addition to our party, I suspect."

"Then we won't have him. His son will be bad enough. Everything in his own home is done in good style, I dare say, and he'll look down on us."

"No, Georgy, he's not such a fool. He knows

well enough that his father's home is made and ours is to make ; and he is also aware that if he were to marry to-morrow himself, he would not live one bit better than we are doing ; and to tell you the truth, my dear, he is a very great admirer of yours, and envies me not a little."

Oh, does he ?" I answered, dryly ; but still I could not help blushing and feeling glad, for it always pleased me when any one admired me to Fred. I had often been told, and often heard it said, that I was a pretty girl, and I had had my little vanities like other girls, I suppose ; but now I only valued my beauty, such as it was, inasmuch as it gave pleasure to Fred, and gratified *his* vanity, not my own. That is one of the nicest parts of being married—you cease to feel anything except through another person, which is so *much* pleasanter than feeling it yourself.

And so the two days passed over, and the evening of the great event—our first party—drew near. I dressed myself in a white embroidered muslin, spotted with blue, with blue sash, and blue ribands in my hair ; and I, with some difficulty, persuaded Martha to put on her Sunday

gown, and make herself look a little more like a respectable servant and less like a *scaramouch* in a high wind than she did on work-days. Then I gave her some of our own china—a delicate set of French egg-shell, all rose-pink and transparent-looking gold, and our silver teapot, cream-jug, and biscuit-box, and I had them all placed on the table ready, as I wished to avoid, as much as possible, Martha's scuffling about in the room ; for I could not conceal from myself that Martha *did* scuffle a great deal more than was necessary or desirable in genteel society.

The first thing she did on this particular occasion was to break a cup and saucer while she was arranging the tea-things. I was not mistress of myself when the china fell ; for I could have cried when I saw the lovely pink and gold fragments lying there before my eyes. It always seems to me such a cruel thing to break pretty china. There it is one minute, finely fashioned and exquisite in texture and coloring, and the next (by your fault—not its own) a little heap of shapeless, useless pieces, good for nothing, and only fit to be thrown into the dust-hole.

"Oh, Martha, Martha!" I said, faintly.

"Drat the thing!" said Martha. "It came to bits in my hand, and might have cut me!"

The next thing she did was to throw over the silver jug and spill the small modicum of real cream purchased for the occasion. She set up quite a shriek at this, and exclaimed, "it was the awkwardest jug she ever seed in her born days, and it had spiled her best gown." (N.B.—There was not a drop on any part of her dress.)

I desired her, with a good deal of dignity, to fetch a cloth and wipe up the cream, and while we were in the middle of repairing the disaster, Doctor and Mrs. Goldney arrived.

I did not allow myself to appear discomposed, and Fred also was equal to the occasion; so we ignored Martha and the tea-tray, while we received our guests, and then sat down in the window with them to enjoy the sight of the sun setting behind the hill across the river.

Oh, lovely sunset! how often recalled by me in coming days with a pang of regret, almost too sharp and too bitter for endurance! Alas! why is there such a thing as *almost*? Why do we so

often *almost* die under our sufferings, and yet not quite ? Why has grief so seldom the power to kill ?

Mr. and Mrs. Wilkinson arrived shortly after, and I invited all my guests to draw round the tea-table. But not till after, notwithstanding my precautions, I had had one serious scuffle with Martha, who, when I told her to take the teapot out and put boiling water into it, flatly refused, and insisted on bringing the kettle in instead. Now the kettle was the large, black, never-cleaned kitchen kettle. I circumvented her, though ; for when she came up-stairs with it in her hand, she found me on the landing with the teapot in mine, and there she was obliged to fill it. She glared at me, and muttered to herself, " Well I never ! " but I paid no attention to her, and returned to my tea-table and my guests, at once serene and triumphant.

Mr. Fortescue arrived now, and I was glad that the scuffle with Martha was over before he made his appearance. Mrs. Simper seemed pleased to meet him, and I saw plainly her manner changed to Fred and to me when she found who visited us.

Of all the little meannesses of polite life, I think this is almost the worst, that your estimate of people should be influenced by the rank of those who visit them ; but I believe I have even known those whose estimate of *themselves* was influenced by the same thing.

"I had no idea you had such a pretty look-out from the windows, Mr. Clare," began Mr. Wilkinson ; "nobody, I think, enjoys a fine view so much as I do. There are many of all ages on whom the beauties of Nature are wasted ; but the young and idle often do enjoy them with enthusiasm. Very seldom can the same enthusiasm be found in middle life, especially when that life is filled with business and labor of both mind and body. I am a very remarkable instance of one in whom the taste for the beautiful has survived years and trouble—a very remarkable instance, indeed."

"Unique, I should be inclined to say," said my wicked Fred, very gravely.

Mr. Wilkinson bent his head with an air of modest approval.

"The word is not too strong, sir, to express the fact," he said, suavely.

"Does not that bend of the river remind you of the view from the little book-room at Vaughan Castle?" asked Mrs. Simper, addressing her husband; "the view dear Lady Amelia was so fond of, and had always begged me so to sketch."

As she spoke, she gazed round at us with a fixed set smile, and slightly cleared her throat. To her utter amazement, I replied—

"The river there is so much narrower, and the hill on the other side rises so much more abruptly, that I don't see the resemblance."

She quite stared at me, and said in an incredulous voice, "You know the place?"

"Oh, yes, very well; and we were staying there just before we came here."

"The oak avenue at Vaughan Castle," said Mr. Wilkinson, "is one of the finest I ever saw. I am one of those men who cannot look on old trees without emotion, very lively emotion, the nature of which a less sensitive mind will be incapable of even comprehending."

"How often dear Lady Amelia has asked me to sit with her under one of those old trees!" smiled his wife. "How often she has said she

enjoyed real conversation with a real friend more under their branches than anywhere else !”

“But that must have been a long time ago,” cried I, leaving her just time enough to regard us all with her fixed simper and slightly clear her throat before I spoke ; “for the oak avenue has been cut down these three years.”

Mrs. Simper continued smiling and gazing as if that made no difference whatever in what she had been saying, instead of feeling annihilated, as she ought to have done ; but the people who ought to feel annihilated never do : that sensation of self-abasement is left for simple, modest souls, by whom it ought *not* to be experienced. At last she just murmured, “Sad—sad.”

“I am one of those men,” began Mr. Wilkinson, interested only in himself, and not at all in the oaks. But Doctor Goldney interrupted him—

“Talking of that,” said he, “has any one read the papers to-day ?”

Mr. Wilkinson’s friends had a way (invented I believe, by Doctor Goldney, but willingly followed by all) of saying, “Talking of that,” and introducing an entirely irrelevant subject, when he

uttered the well-known words, "I am one of those men."

Fred and Mr. Fortescue had both read the papers (clerks in offices, I have been told, generally have, as they spend great part of the office-hours in so doing) ; Mrs. Simper had not, neither had I : the she-dragon, of course, had. Mr. Wilkinson tried a faint—"When *I* read the papers ;" but the disquisition on the best method of reading the papers (exemplified by the worthy clergyman's own practice, which would certainly have followed) was lost to the world, for Doctor Goldney was too much for him.

"There was a curious robbery case," said he, rapidly—"a robbery of jewels ; did any one read it ?"

"I did," cried Mr. Fortescue, with unaccustomed eagerness. "Do you mean the chloroform dodge ? —the jeweller's man, who brought a lot of rings and things to a gentleman at a hotel, who threw a handkerchief soaked in chloroform in his face, and marched off with the jewels ? Clever fellow—very."

"It was a vile thing to do," said the doctor's

wife. "No one can tell what effect chloroform may have on another, unless he knows his constitution."

"Fancy a thief feeling his victim's pulse and looking at his tongue before he robs him," said the doctor, dryly.

"Is chloroform dangerous?" asked Mr. Fortescue.

"Very much so," replied the doctor.

"Now, if I wanted to rob the bank," said Fred—

Mr. Fortescue gave a great start and got quite white, or I fancied he did, and I wished Fred would not rush on so, and I signalled him a family look, but he did not heed me.

"If I wanted to rob the bank, what would you advise me to dumbfozzle old Grimble and our friend here" (signifying Mr. Fortescue) "with, Doctor Goldney?"

"Well, my dear sir, it is a difficult question, and too important to be answered in a hurry," said the doctor, with an air of importance.

"Try hasheesh, Mr. Clare," said the she-dra-goon."

"Try how much?" asked Fred. "I beg your pardon. I declare, Mrs. Goldney, that's what my wife is always scolding me for saying. Really, Georgie, you ought to have cured me by this time. I wonder at you. I'm afraid you neglect me."

"But what *is* hasheesh?" asked I.

"It is a favorite Indian narcotic," explained the doctor, "and very useful in many cases. They *smoke* it, Mr. Clare."

"That's the thing," cried Fred. "If I smoke it will old Grimble go to sleep, like a blessed old baby, as he is?"

"No, no. If you smoke it you'll feel the effects yourself—soothing, exhilarating, exciting, and finally producing insensibility : but the respectable Mr. Grimble will remain untouched. Did you never hear of how the Malays run a-muck?"

"Never."

"Well, it's the most wonderful way of committing suicide I know. . When a Malay is desperate from gambling, or any other cause, and determined to live no longer, he smokes hasheesh till it produces a state of desperate, reckless, and, I suppose, enjoyable excitement. Then, with

drawn sword, he rushes through a town, killing every creature he meets, till, as the last act of the drama, he is killed himself."

"And is that called running a-muck?" said I.

"It is at once sad and gratifying," said Mr. Wilkinson, "for a man, from his own elevation, to look down on the degradation of his fellow-men. I am one of those men who—"

"Hardly *fellow-men*," simpered his wife, with her fixed gaze.

"I am one of those men who—" continued Mr. Wilkinson.

"But it's no use. Hasheesh, I mean," interrupted Mr. Fortescue. "I mean one could not use *it* on an emergency."

"There's another way of taking the same thing," said the doctor—"subzee—when the leaves are chopped up and eaten like spinach. Any lady could order a dish of subzee for dinner who wished to reduce her refractory spouse to a state of insensibility."

"And what is it?" said Mr. Fortescue, almost impatiently. "What *is* hasheesh?"

"Hemp," said the doctor.

"Hemp!" cried the other. "Why, isn't there an extract of hemp? Haven't I seen, or heard of extract of hemp among our own medicines?"

"No doubt," said the doctor; "and you have hit on the very thing Mr. Clare is seeking for—a few drops of extract of hemp in a glass of wine or whisky, and our friend Mr. Grimble's state of mind and body will become exactly what he desires."

"What is it used for generally?" asked Mr. Fortescue, in a low, eager voice. "Toothache? Neuralgia?"

"Well," said the doctor, "it might be of use in either of those cases; but it isn't a medicine I should recommend."

"You'll never recommend it to *me*, I hope," said my husband; "a few drops of any of those narcotic nastinesses plays the deuce with me."

"I never touch anything but ether," said Mrs. Simper. "Dear Lady Falkland used to give it me; ten drops in a glass of water—nothing else."

And she smiled and gazed, while her husband remarked:

"I am one of those men whose extremely sensitive nerves will hardly allow them to take

medicines of any kind. Some constitutions are so exquisitely strung that a drop, a touch, is too much. Ah, me! there are disadvantages connected with such extreme sensibility, from which human nature, in its weaker phases, is free."

And he sighed with a tender regret over his own incapacity for taking physic.

"Mrs. Wilkinson," said I, "will you be so very kind as to give us a little music?"

A great deal of music, from one and all, followed this request.

Mrs. Wilkinson and Mrs. Goldney both played. Fred and I sang duets, and Doctor Goldney gave us a comic song. Mr. Wilkinson chanted a low bass to some of his wife's tunes, which they had much better have been without, but I think he disliked anything being done by her, or, indeed, by any one else, unless he helped. Then we all accused Mr. Fortescue of being the only unmusical member of the company; on which he asked me to accompany him in some songs, and astonished us by the power and culture of his voice.

Conversation and music had brought us so far past ten o'clock that I determined not to intro-

duce the photographs, but to reserve them for another occasion ; and, at half-past ten, Martha, according to the orders she had received beforehand, brought in the cake and the wine, but *not* the strawberries !

When I had waited long enough to feel sure she had forgotten them, I rang for her, but had to ring three times before she made her appearance.

“ Bring the strawberries,” I said.

“ There bain’t none.”

“ Oh, yes,” I said, faintly. “ Ask Mrs. Crumpledum : she has them.”

“ She hasn’t,” replied Martha. “ The CAT took them.”

And so she left the room, banging the door after her.

“ With cream, I hope,” said the doctor ; on which we all laughed.

But, of all the depredations of lodging-house cats—and their number and variety are legion—none, I think, ever equalled that of Mrs. Crumpledum’s cat at my first party.

CHAPTER IX.

ANXIETY.

THE guests were all gone. Jack Fortescue, as my husband called him, lingered to the last, and Fred, naturally enough, ran down-stairs with him, when he *did* take his departure ; but I could not help wondering why they stood chatting on the door-steps so long. Surely, considering that they had just spent the evening together, and that they always spent every morning in each other's company, they could not have so very much to say to each other, and what they *had* to say might have been uttered in my presence. It was past eleven o'clock, and I did think it very odd of Fred to loiter as he was doing, instead of coming up in a hurry to me to talk the evening over. What was the use of giving a party if we did not talk it over afterwards ? They might just as well

have remained in the drawing-room, and allowed me to have the benefit of their conversation. It was really very rude and ungentlemanly of him not to have done so. But, then, that was a point on which my dear Fred and I must agree to differ. I did *not* like Mr. Jack Fortescue, and I *did* think him quite capable of behaving in a rude and ungentlemanly manner.

I was growing impatient and provoked as these thoughts ran through my mind, and disposed to receive Fred with a little wholesome severity when he condescended to return to me ; but when he at last made his appearance, my mood changed, for never since I knew him first, had I seen such an expression of gloom and despondency in his sweet, open face.

“ Oh, Fred,” I cried, “ what *is* the matter ? ”

He shook himself, brushed his hand over his eyes, as if he could thus efface the expression that had quite alarmed me, smiled, but not genially—not like himself—and replied, “ The matter, darling ? Nothing whatever.”

“ Oh, but there is,” I cried. “ What has that wretched man been saying to you ? ”

He looked at me oddly.

"That wretched man, Georgy? Why do you call him *that*? Would he not generally be considered a very jolly sort of a man?"

"I'm sure I don't know, and I don't care, either. I think there's something sinister about him, and that his influence over you is not a happy one."

"What *can* make you think so?"

"Everything and nothing; but I *do* think it."

"Women are witches."

"Oh, then, I am right. He is—he does. 'Tell me, Fred, what is it? Don't have mysteries with me; there's a dear boy.'"

"My dear child, it is you are making the mysteries—not I. If you tell me what I am to tell you, I will tell it you directly; but how can I tell it you when I don't know what I am to tell, Peter Piper, &c."

"What made you look so gloomy just now?"

"Ah, now you do puzzle me; for, not knowing that I looked gloomy, how am I to account for having done so?"

"You are very provoking, Fred."

"Am I, really? On the contrary, I think I am."

behaving beautifully under provocation. I say, Georgy, what a bore old Wilkinson is?"

"*That* he is. We wont ask him again, will we? His 'I am not one of those men' is as bad as Joseph Surface's 'the man who—' And yet, I dare say he is as good a creature as ever lived."

"Poor old boy—he's better than his wife, at any rate. A woman with a fixed smile on her face ought to be hanged."

"What care I must take not to smile too much!"

"Yes, you'd be destroyed entirely, as the Irishers say, if that lovely smile of yours, which is always taking one by surprise, was fixed on your face—you'd lose your charms."

I laughed and I blushed; for I never could keep from blushing just as much as I did in the days of our early acquaintance when my Fred said those kind, pleasant things to me."

"I'll tell you what, Georgy," exclaimed he, after a little pause, thrusting his hands deep down into his trousers' pockets, "this is an uncommonly difficult world to live in."

"Oh, Fred!"

"Yes, my pet, it is; not to a sweet little bit of a golden-haired girl like you, but to men—to young men—it's a difficult world, an uncommonly difficult world to live in."

"But why, Fred? I can't in the least imagine why."

"Oh, it's easy enough where there's plenty of money. It's the want of money undoes a man. I don't give that," snapping his fingers, "to big swells for living straight. It's as easy for a fellow with his pockets full of gold to keep out of scrapes as it is for a woman to dress well if she has velvet gowns and diamond brooches."

"But a woman may dress charmingly in white muslin and blue ribands," said I, laughing at myself in the glass.

"She must be half an angel to seem well dressed then," replied Fred, smiling at me affectionately; "but in velvet and diamonds she's well dressed, though she's half a devil."

"Oh, hush, hush! Don't say such words, my dear Fred."

"It's true, Georgy, and it's the same about money and men." A man who keeps all right on

small means must have a deal of the angel in him ; but, if he can't do it with lots of tin, I can only say that he has a deal of the other thing."

"Well," said I, "it seems to me a pity to make so much of money. I dare say rich men have plenty of temptations, too. I can quite fancy a rich man envying a poor one, because his temptations are fewer than his own."

"Can you?" replied Fred, dryly. "*I* can't."

The next morning Fred was in rattling spirits at breakfast ; but though it did not occur to me at the time, I thought afterwards, in the miserable days, when I looked back to that very breakfast as to one of my last moments of happiness, that his spirits were rather forced. Oh, *how* I looked back to that breakfast ! How I longed with an aching pain, which I hope few have ever known, that I had stopped him in his merry talk, and asked him if he was really well and really happy. I could not tell what the result of such an appeal might have been, and with a terrible • remorse I was for ever demanding of myself why—why—*why* I had not done it. But it never occurred to me at the time that there was any-

thing wrong ; and when he laughed I laughed too ; and when he rattled so did I ; and so the precious moments, on which so much might have depended, flitted by, and the last hope, the last chance for our happiness, went with them.

I spent my day as usual. Blind as we are, what would I not have done with that day if I had but known—if I had but known ! Miserable words, for ever haunting our lives, and for ever haunting them too late ! Well, I need not linger on the calm, pleasant hours in which I still played with life and trifled with happiness, as if both were eternal certainties of which nothing could deprive me. Calm, pleasant hours, hurrying me on to that dreadful crisis, when earth became as nought, and heaven seemed impossible.

Fred returned home late to dinner, for the first time since we were married. He told me he had been detained, and could not help it ; and there was—or did I fancy it afterwards?—an indescribable softness and tenderness in his manner towards me. After dinner he said that he must go out.

“Without me, Fred ?” I cried, astonished.

"Yes, without you, darling ; but I shan't be long. I shall be back in an hour."

"But where *can* you be going ?"

"I'm going to play a game of billiards with Jack Fortescue."

"Not really ?"

"Yes ; but you wont mind. I couldn't help myself, and it's the last I mean to play with him. In fact, we mayn't play at all, but I promised to meet him at the billiard-rooms, and I must do it. I'll tell you what, Georgy, I'll explain all about it to you when I come back, and you'll see I was right to go, and couldn't help myself."

"Oh, very well, Fred. It's rather disagreeable, you know, but I don't mind much ; only come back as fast as you can—there's a dear."

"Trust me for that, Georgy," and he kissed me—a little, light, passing kiss—and was gone ; and so I was left alone for an hour. For an hour ? Yes. For two hours ? Yes. For three hours ? Yes, for the minutes crept slowly and more slowly away, and it was nine o'clock, and Fred had not yet come home.

Then I suddenly grew desperate, and sent for Mrs. Crumpledum.

"Mrs. Crumpledum, I am quite sure that my husband is ill."

"Laws, Mrs. Clare, I 'ope not. What is he feelin', poor gentleman? As he 'ad small-pox? My Crumpledum was took dreadful bad three weeks and a day afore he died, and the pistols did aggravate him uncommon. There's no denyin' that, Mrs. Clare, so I'll not attempt doing so."

"But that's nonsense. Oh, please, don't. He went out at six, and said he'd be gone only an hour, and here's nine o'clock."

"Oh, the gentleman's out—is he?"

"Yes; he's been out *three* hours. He must be ill. What *shall* I do?"

"Don't you mind a bit, Mrs. Clare. He'll come 'ome all right by-and-bye, or only just a little the worse for liquor. It's a way those young gents have—all of 'em—and never a 'air the worse for it they air, 'cept the 'edache next morning."

"Oh, how *can* you say so? It's not true—he never did. The worse for liquor! Oh, how can you say such horrid things?"

"Laws, ma'am, it's not 'orrid—nor a bit 'orrid ; it's only 'uman natur—gent's 'uman natur. I knows 'em, bless their 'arts ; I knows 'em pretty considerable—I do."

"You *don't* know Mr. Clare, and you oughtn't to say such things. I want you to tell me what I'd better do."

"Where did he go, ma'am, if I may make so bold as to ask? or where did he *tell* you he'd gone? poor dear!"

"I wont be called poor dear. I'm not poor dear. I wish you'd go away, Mrs. Crumpledum. You're worse than useless."

"Don't you get in a tantrum with me. I only wants to 'elp you." Then, in a coaxing tone, as if asking a child to take physic, "Where did he *say* he'd gone, now?"

"He said he'd gone where he went—to the billiard-rooms."

"Laws, my dear, to the billiard-rooms! He wont be back till twelve o'clock then. They turns 'em out at twelve, and he'll not be back a minute afore he can 'elp. Those young gents never air."

"Mrs. Crumpledum, I'm sure he's ill. Will you go to the billiard-rooms yourself, and just ask if anything's the matter?"

"No, I won't, ma'am. They don't like being fetched 'ome—not any of 'em. A many's a time I've been to the public to fetch 'ome my Crumpledum ; and, for all the times I went, he never comed but onct, and I'd as lief he 'adn't comed then, for he gave me a black eye immediate on the door-step."

"I don't want you to fetch him home. Such nonsense !" cried I, in despair. "I just want you to go to the door and ask who's there, and if any one has been taken ill. I'd go myself, but I know he would be vexed."

"They don't like it, them gents don't, as if their nurses was sent for 'em."

"Oh, how very unkind you are ! Can't you in the least understand what it is to be in this sort of suspense ? Will you really not do it for me ? Will you send Martha, then ?"

"No, I wont do it myself, and I wont send Martha neither. You wait till twelve o'clock. Laws, he'll come soon enough then, cos they

wont let 'im stay any longer, and the publics is all shut at twelve o'clock, too ; so there's no place for 'em but 'ome, and then they comes reg'lar, and it's a blessed thin' to 'ave 'em come reg'lar, any way, Mrs. Clare."

With which consolatory remark Mrs. Crumple-dum took her departure, and made her way downstairs again into the kitchen. When thus left alone, I shed a few tears from pure vexation. It was almost ten o'clock now. What *should* I do ? True, the lateness of the hour, so terrible in one way, diminished the terrors of the watcher in another, for suspense cannot last forever ; and the later the hour, the nearer that moment approaches when suspense must be over. Ten o'clock—half-past ten—eleven. He *must* be home soon. At eleven o'clock it was more irrational to send out after him than at six, because in a very few minutes he *must* appear, or, if he had, indeed, been taken ill earlier in the evening, I must have heard of it ; but nervousness makes one irrational, so at eleven o'clock I wrote a note as follows :

"DEAREST FRED,—I am so uneasy, I fear you are ill, or that something is the matter. Send me one line by the bearer, I entreat you.—G. C."

Then I rang the bell, and when Martha answered the summons, looking extremely cross at being kept up to open the door considerably beyond her usual hour, I desired her to put on her bonnet and take the note at once to the billiard-rooms, ask for Mr. Clare, and wait for an answer. Martha stared at me with that stony, impenetrable stare that is the only thing wanting when you are in a state of feverish suspense and anxiety, to make you feel how easy it would be for you to become mad. My brain seemed to reel. I stamped my foot, and said in an unnatural voice—"Go !"

"Oh, very well," said Martha, tossing her head; "but I isn't hired for this'n."

"Oh, never mind what you are hired for," cried I, desperately ; "only *go* !"

And I spoke so desperately that she went. What an unbearable time it was while she was absent ! How did I endure it at all ? Alas, how much more than that I had to endure ! How

much one suffers when one is miserable, that in happy days one cries out against as sorrow that *could* not be borne ! I believe those hearts are the happiest that are most easily broken. But, alas, we *can* bear so very much !

How I watched and waited for Martha's return ! For Martha's return ? No ; for Fred's ! Surely he will come, I kept saying. He will not answer my note—he will come—he will come ; and while I was still saying the words out loud, with my body stretched through the open window, a figure turned the corner of High Street, on to the quay—only one figure—and it was Martha !

I rushed down-stairs, and opening the house-door, stretched out my hand to her.

"Give it me," I said.

She put a note into my hand. I ran in, and standing under the lamp in the hall, tore it open. It was my own !

I turned towards her, and held it out.

"What is it ?" I cried.

"Your note, mum," replied Martha, cheerfully.

"Did you see him, then ? Is he coming ?"

"He was'nt there, mum."

"Not there !"

"No, and hadn't bin since six this evenin'. They said he staid ten minutes, and went out again, with his 'at on one side and a pipe in his mouth. That's for why I never married !"

"And where is he ?"

"No decent body knows, mum ; but this you may be sure, he's somewhere he didn't ought to be, and that's for why I never married ! Her Crumpledum was the same, and your Fred's the same, and the men is all alike, and I'm blessed if I'll ever marry a mother's son of 'em."

"And does no one know where he is ?" I cried despairingly.

"Not a ha'porth," said Martha, triumphantly ; "and I'm goin' to bed. You can let him in yourself, ma'am, when he comes ; and if he's very bad indeed, and you're not strong enough to get him up-stairs, there's a'orse-'air sofy in missis's back dining-room, where he might sleep it off comfortable."

I believe she really meant well when she said this, and uttered the words in compassion to my white cheeks and haggard eyes, little guessing

what a pang every word she uttered inflicted upon me. When she was gone I covered my face in my two hands to shut out the world (had it been possible I would have shut out myself), and groaned aloud.

“They are such wicked women that they think everybody is wicked, but I know better,” I cried. “Oh, my love, come back ! come back, my love!”

And then I walked about the room and looked out of the window, and walked and looked again, and wrung my hands and cried—“Come back, my love!” and so the night dragged slowly on, and hour after hour passed away, till it was nearly three o'clock in the lovely summer morning, and my burthen was harder than I could bear.

My burthen was harder than I could bear, and the walls of the house could hold me no longer. I threw a shawl over my shoulders, I put a hat on my head, I felt that I was getting stifled, suffocated, under a roof, and with its four dreadful walls closing round me. So, softly I went on tip-toe down-stairs, though why I moved so gently I knew not, for who was there I could wake only Mrs. Crumpledum and Martha, both sleeping soundly

at the top of the house, far removed from any sound my feet could make?

And so, at three o'clock in the morning, I wandered forth into the moonlight all alone—the beautiful moonlight, so cold and so pure, and speaking with no voice of comfort to my affrighted heart.

CHAPTER X.

DESPAIR.

WHERE was I to go? What was I to do? Where did I *intend* to go? What did I *expect* to do? I had no answer for any of these questions. I do not think I even asked them of myself, or that in going out I had any hope of finding my husband. Wherever he was, he was not likely to be walking about the place; and I only rushed from the house because, as I said before, my burthen had become intolerable, and I found I could no longer breathe within its walls.

I wandered on by the river's side, not knowing where I went or what I did, till I came to the sudden turn, where you could watch its waters flowing gallantly out towards the sea. There the moonlight poured down its silver flood, and full in the midst of it a large ship, with all its sails

spread, floated joyously on—flags flying, and its decks covered with people. It was far off from me, but not too far for me to see the moving specks speaking of life on its decks. And oh, how beautiful and how grand a sight that ship was in the beautiful grand moonlight! I stood like one spell-bound watching it, while every moment took it further and further away from me. I felt a strange wish that I was on board, sailing on, and on, and on, out into the wide trackless ocean—away from an earth that troubled me. It was the same ship that we had seen lying at anchor near the bridge, and that had looked to me so big in the moonlight. *We*—Fred and I. Oh Fred, Fred! where were you? Why did you frighten me so? Were you at this minute at home more frightened in your search for me than I in mine for you, as had been the case that other evening when you left me? Then, I had been angry, and felt neglected; I had quarrelled with you, my Fred. I did not feel angry now; I would not scold you if I saw you. Out of a more intimate knowledge had grown a more complete confidence, and the only one thing I felt distinctly

was that you were not to blame—that you could not help this absence, and that you would be with me if you could.

I went hastily back to the house, with a hope in my heart that you were there; but, when I reached it, the windows were dark, and I saw that the hope was vain. I tried to open the door: it was fast shut. I had myself closed it, forgetting when I did so that it would not open from the outside. I was locked out, and I had no means of entering the house again, nor, I well knew, would it be of the slightest use for me to knock, for the knocker—there was no bell—could not be heard in the garrets where the two women slept. What a situation I had placed myself in! and what could I possibly do? Must I wander about all night? Already I was feeling faint and cold, worn out by anxiety, grief, and watching, and I was attired only in my thin muslin dress, with a light summer shawl thrown about me. What would become of me?

I stood in a sort of despair, and then I called wildly upon Fred—Fred, who was always near me, who protected me always, and whom I could

not live without. What would Fred say if he could now see his darling, locked out here by herself in the middle of the night? And then it came to me, with a strange yet home-like feeling of comfort, how we should talk it all over, and even make a joke of it, by-and-bye. Surely I was allowing myself to be miserable and frightened about nothing. What was it? Why was I standing out here, trembling and wretched, and beginning to feel as if I hardly understood things? Fred was late: was not that all? Late? Ah, no! he had not returned all night, and he had left me at six o'clock for an hour! What should I do? Oh! what *should* I do? He must be ill, or have met with an accident, and I was letting the time pass on, and doing nothing for him. Doing nothing? Yes; but what was there I *could* do? Oh, for a man to help me! I could do nothing myself; Mrs. Crumpledum and Martha were useless. Oh, if Mr. Crumpledum was alive! he could advise me and act for me. I had not spirits even for a smile when I found myself wishing for Mr. Crumpledum, but I did wish

for him most sincerely, and feel the utter helplessness of woman most keenly.

Then the idea occurred to me that the clergyman of the place was the natural person to apply to in any case of difficulty or trouble, but *with* the idea came the certainty that I *could* not apply to Mr. Wilkinson. He would not think of Fred or of me, but only of himself; and how could I wait to be told that he was one of those men, when *I* could not think of *him*, but only of Fred? And then his wife's fixed smile—how could I *bear* that? I felt as if it would drive me mad. I have no doubt now that I was wrong, for they were good people both of them, and would probably have forgotten themselves when really called upon to help a fellow-creature—forgotten themselves for the moment, for in retrospect they would have remembered, with vivid gratitude, all that they had felt, thought, and done, and how much better, wiser, and kinder it was than what anybody else would have felt, thought, or done under the same circumstances. If good people only knew the harm they do by allowing an outside crust of self-enjoyment and conceit to cover

them ! However, I felt the Wilkinsons were impossible ; but Dr. Goldney ? He was a very different sort of person. Might I not venture to go to him ? Doctors are accustomed to be called up in the night : they have night-bells on purpose ; so, before my courage could fail me, I walked straight off, without pausing for a second, to that good man's house, and for the first time in my life, rang a doctor's night-bell. In what must have been a very short time, for even to me it did not seem a long one, a window was opened, a head was put out of it, and a voice demanded—

“ Who wants me ? ”

I tried to speak, and found I could not. I moved my lips, and no sounds came from them ; but my face was lifted up, and my busy, silent lips must have been distinctly visible in the bright moonlight.

I dare say it was a ghastly face made ghastlier by that silver radiance ; for I felt as if life itself had left face, and head, and all my outer body, and only lingered still for a minute or two longer somewhere near my heart.

“ God bless my soul, Mrs. Clare ! it can't be

you! My dear child, I'll be down directly. What is the matter?"

These words sounded in my ears like the refrain of some distant song that I had been hearing all my life, and must go on hearing for ever. Then the door opened: something large and dark—was it the figure of a man?—stood before me; and then the earth under my feet sank down, and I sank down after it, with a horrible sensation of sinking *through* it; and after that I knew no more. Of course I had fainted; and I came to life again in the doctor's hall; my face was wet, my hat was off, and something sharp and pungent penetrated through my nostrils to my brain.

My first consciousness was of a pair of surprised, piercing eyes, looking hard into my face.

"Take time," said a voice; "collect yourself. Why did you come here? Is anybody ill?"

"*Why* did I? *Was* anybody?" I smiled in an idiotic fashion, and faintly shook my head.

"Where is your husband?" said the doctor, so loudly and sternly that I gave a great start, and memory rushed back to me on the instant.

"Oh, he never came home—he never came home!" I cried, wringing my hands wildly.

"Where did he go?"

"I don't know—oh, I don't know—that's what I came about. I thought you might help me."

"I wish to help you."

"Oh, thank you—thank you!"

"But you must tell me how."

By this time I had recovered my senses, as well as my memory, and as calmly and coherently as I could I told Doctor Goldney exactly what had happened from first to last. He listened with profound attention, his eyes, full of keen intelligence, never leaving my face.

When I had done, he was silent for a moment. Then he spoke.

"Well," he said, rather slowly, "I don't think there's much to be frightened at."

"Where is he?" I cried, with a sudden hope that he knew all about it.

"I'll tell you where I *think* he is. Jack Fortescue has a farm four miles from this, where he often sleeps in a cottage he has built upon it,

and he sometimes takes a friend out with him. I think your husband is there."

"There?" I cried, bewildered; "but he would never go there and stay there without telling me."

"Has he never done anything of the sort before?"

"What! Fred? Never—never!"

"Everything must have a beginning, and I think he has now. Use your own good sense, Mrs. Clare. No accident could happen to him. He could not have been taken ill anywhere in this little town without your having heard of it hours ago. He is very intimate with Jack Fortescue. I am sorry to say they spend too much of their time playing billiards together, when they ought to be at the bank. You know they met at the billiard-rooms in the evening, and you may take my word for it they went out to the White Cottage together."

"I know my husband, and you do not. Nothing on earth is so impossible as that he should leave me in that way."

"My dear young lady, I know men and you do

not. You have been a very short time married. He would not *mean* to leave you. Jack would take him there, telling him he should be back in an hour. Then he would bring out something to eat and drink, and a pack of cards or a brace of dice, and when bedtime came—well, they'd be in a fitter state to go to sleep at the White Cottage than to return to Lynsford."

Was all the world in a tale? This, in more refined language, was only Mrs. Crumpledum and Martha over again. Would no one have confidence in Fred—no one but his wife?

"Then he has met with an accident on the way home," I cried, piteously. "He might go out there for an hour, for he *told* me he must be away for an hour, but he would not stay as you fancy, and he has met with some accident coming home."

"No, my dear, he hasn't," said the doctor softly. "Don't be foolish. He has stayed at the cottage; trust me that he has. He's very young, and Jack Fortescue is a bad friend for him. You should discourage their intimacy as much as possible."

Had I not done so, and from an undefined feeling that Dr. Goldney had now put into words? but, for all that, I answered very proudly—"Fred might do him good, but Mr. Fortescue could not do Fred any harm."

The doctor smiled at me kindly, and patted my head.

"My dear," he said, "if Fred is young, you are still younger. You don't know the world; you don't know all that young men have in them, or how easily they are persuaded. Do you think *I* don't know your husband is a good lad—a very good lad?—that I don't read the life he has led, in his fresh complexion, his clear eye, and boyish smile? Tut, tut, my dear! I know as much about him as if I had lived with him; but I also know what men have in them, and how easily they are persuaded when they are as young and inexperienced as Mr. Clare still is."

I listened in silence, unconvinced, but not finding any words with which I could reply.

"Now, if you'll take my advice," said Doctor Goldney, soothingly, "you'll just go home, and to bed, and to sleep, and think no more about it,

and the husband will make his appearance at the breakfast table in the morning, very penitent and very affectionate, or a little cross and stand-off, as the case may be ; and if you'll take my advice, you'll not make *too* much of it, but yet you'll make *enough*, and let him know how frightened you were, but *don't* go into hysterics ; and keep him as much away from Jack Fortescue for the future, and make his evenings at home as pleasant as you possibly can ;" and again he patted my head with a fatherly kindness.

But I heard his lecture with dreary despair—despair of making any one in the world understand me. Every word he said sounded so reasonable ; all my words were so weak in comparison ; and yet I was as sure that I was right and that he was wrong, and that Fred had not remained a whole night away from me willingly, and without telling me what he was going to do, as if I had read it in my Bible.

"Doctor Goldney," I cried out at last, with a great effort, "it is *not* so ; I *know* it isn't. Either your theory is entirely wrong, and he is not there at all ; or, if he went there, he is ill, and CAN-

NOT return. I *entreat* you to believe me—pray, *pray* do. I cannot go home, or to bed or to sleep: it is impossible. I *must* learn what is the matter first. I *know* that what you believe to have happened CANNOT have happened.”

I spoke with such earnest faith, that, hopeless as I was of producing an impression, I did produce it, and I saw that I did so.

Doctor Goldney was silent, and thought deeply within himself for a second or two. Then he looked up at me brightly.

“A wilful woman must have her way,” he said. “I’ll tell you what I’ll do—I’ve a patient or two in that direction. It’s not far from five o’clock now,” looking at his watch; “I’ll put the saddle on Black Nancy myself, and ride over to the White Cottage, and then I’ll bring you word how the land lies.”

I struggled hard to thank him, but the words would not come; so I took his hand in both mine and pressed it, and thanked him with my eyes, though my lips were silent. In ten minutes he had completed his toilet and saddled his horse.

"You stay here quietly," he said, "and I'll come back to you. I shall be back long before any one in the house is stirring. I'll do the whole thing in forty minutes."

"There will be no fear of Mrs. Goldney?" said I.

He gave an odd sort of a smile, but replied, gravely, "No fear whatever."

"Then I will stay here."

And I did stay, and spent a weary hour in waiting for his return. Strange and heartless as it may seem, I am not at all sure that I did not sleep during part of it. I lay down on the sofa, and covered my face with my hands to shut out the miserable daylight, and, having had no sleep that night, I really believe I dozed a little off and on. I was awake, I am certain, the moment before, and yet I heard no noise, when I gave a great start, and opening my eyes, saw Doctor Goldney standing by me booted and spurred, with his riding-whip in his hand, and his eyes fixed on my face. My first confused idea was that he had not yet started. Then I remembered how I had been watching and waiting; and I jumped up breathlessly, and called out, "Well?"

The doctor made me sit down again, and said nothing.

"Can't you speak?" I cried, angrily. "How cruel you are! Can't you speak?"

"I went to the White Cottage," he said, slowly, and then he came to a pause.

Was the worst going to happen? Were all my fears real, and not play? As it seemed to me now, they must have been, when the terror of an approaching certainty seized hold of me.

"Is he DEAD?" I had spoken the words, and was still alive myself.

"No, no, no!" cried the doctor, eagerly, and speaking rapidly enough now; "and I've not the least doubt he's alive and well. Just think how very, very seldom anything bad really happens, and how over and over again people get a fright, and it ends in nothing. He *must* appear soon, and account for himself. I haven't a doubt of it. The only thing is, that *I* was mistaken. He had *not* been to the White Cottage; neither had Jack Fortescue. That's all."

• "Oh," I replied, slowly, and with a sort of stunned feeling, "is that all?"

Then I looked up suddenly, and gave a little laugh, that frightened myself when I heard it.

"Perhaps he's at home," I said, and I laughed again, and felt more frightened.

"No," replied Doctor Goldney, reluctantly; "he's not at home. I got in at the dining-room window, and went up-stairs and ascertained *that*."

"But he might come or *send*"—I said the last word with a shudder—"any minute, and I ought to be there. I'll go home at once. I ought to be there—I ought to be there!" and my voice seemed rising as I spoke, out of my own control, and I looked about me piteously and appealingly, as if searching for the self-command I had lost.

Doctor Goldney disappeared into a neighboring room, and quickly returned with something in a glass, which he made me drink.

"Is it hasheesh?" I asked, with a wan smile, my thoughts returning to the merry talk of the previous evening, and then I moaned and cried, "Oh, Doctor Goldney, why did I say that? I didn't mean to say it. Am I going mad?"

"Not a bit of it," said the doctor, cheerily; "you are excited and worn out, and have not

slept, but what I've given you will set you to rights again. Now, take my arm, and we'll go home."

I obeyed him mechanically and unresistingly, and, even as we walked home, a strange, unnatural drowsiness crept over me, and my eyelids grew too heavy for me to keep them open. My companion — my kind, paternal friend — whose fatherly goodness made but little impression on me at the moment, not only took me home, but helped me into my own room; and made me lie down on the bed. He threw a shawl over me, and darkened the window, and then he left me. I submitted to it all: my senses seemed under a spell, and mind and body had both succumbed to its influence. It was not till afterwards I learned that he had given me a sleeping draught, and it was not till I woke that I knew I had been asleep for many hours. That sleep probably saved my life or my reason.

CHAPTER XI.

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THE time that followed still seemed to me like a time of dreams ; and through all those dreadful days I hardly ever lost that stunned feeling which every sufferer, I suppose, has felt during the first stages of affliction, and without which I have sometimes thought that affliction, in its first stages, would be intolerable.

When I awoke from that profound slumber produced by Doctor Goldney's narcotic, I was for some minutes languid and confused, and it was a still longer time before I really remembered all that had happened. Then I sprang up from the bed, terrified and conscience stricken. Was it, indeed, possible that, with Fred still away, with my dreadful fears about him unappeased, I had really slept ? I wondered at myself, and I hated

myself, and when I undrew the curtains, and saw how high the sun sat in the heavens, my wonder and my self-condemnation were excessive. I changed my dress and washed my face and hands; this only took me a few minutes, and I did it from sheer want of courage to meet the world again, and to learn whether anything, or nothing, had happened. I put off the moment when I must hear the truth, because I did not dare to hear it. I said to myself, as if I knew it to be a fact, "He has come back, of course he has come back;" and then I shrank from asking if he had, because I expected the reply would be in the negative.

At last I could bear this self-imposed suspense no longer; I opened the sitting-room door, and peeped in, sick with hope and fear. No one was there—no, of course no one was there. It was past noon, and when Fred returned and found me asleep, of course he took his breakfast and went to the bank. What else could he do? If he had remained here, it would only have been because he was ill; so, of all things, it behooved me to be most thankful he was *not* here. Thank-

fulness is a strange feeling if it was that which made my heart sink within me when I rang the bell, and felt cold thrills and tremors all over my frame as Martha answered it, and I contrived, though almost inarticulately, to utter the question :

“Did Mr. Clare come back?”

“No, ma’am, he didn’t,” said Martha; “but messengers came from Fortescue’s bank to know the reason why.”

“Very well,” I said, faintly, and then I sat down and looked at the untasted breakfast still standing on the table, with the two cups and the two plates—mine and Fred’s; but I felt so stupid that the sight did not affect me—neither raising appetite nor regret. I just kept gazing at it, but hardly taking in all that it meant, or that anything meant.

I am sure I don’t know how long I should have remained in this way if Martha had not opened the door and said, “A gentleman.”

I turned towards her, still feeling stupid and bewildered, and found that an elderly, commonplace looking man, dressed like a gentleman, had

entered the room. He regarded me with some surprise.

"I have made a mistake, perhaps," said he politely. "I was certainly told that Mr. Clare lodged here."

"Yes," I replied, faintly.

"Then," with some hesitation of manner, "am I speaking to—his sister?"

"I am his wife."

"His wife! Bless me! I never heard that he was married. And so young, too!—a mere child. Indeed, young lady, I am extremely sorry for you."

I answered, with scorn, "You need not be sorry. I am proud of being his wife;" for I thought to myself—"This man is going to blame him like all the rest."

"Do you know where he is?" said my visitor, looking round him in a suspicious manner.

"I do not. Do you? Oh, sir, I entreat you to tell me if you do!"

"I do not know where he is. Has he been at home this morning or last night?"

"Who are you, sir, who ask these questions?"

"Well, there is no reason why I should not tell you who I am. There is nothing to be gained by concealing it. I am Mr. Fortescue."

"What!" I cried, without the least recognizing that I was speaking rudely, "are you old Fortescue?"

He looked surprised and annoyed.

"Yes, madam; I am old Fortescue."

His manner recalled me to myself.

"Oh, I beg your pardon," I said, "I spoke without thinking; but you can tell me, *has* my husband been at the bank this morning?"

"He has *not*. I sent down to inquire why he was absent, and the answer was, that he had not been at home since six o'clock yesterday evening. Is that true?"

"Oh yes," I replied, wearily, "it is true."

"It is a very serious case, madam—a very serious case, indeed."

"Oh," I cried, with sudden passion, "you are going to blame him like the rest. It is horrible! it is terrible! it is cruel! He must be ill, or he has met with an accident, and everybody is blaming him. He never would have frightened

me so, and remained out all night, if he could have helped it. What do you or Doctor Goldney know of him? *I* know him, and I feel sure."

"What has Doctor Goldney to do with it?"

"I went to him in the middle of the night, and told him all about it."

"What did you tell him?"

"Ask *him!*" I said, wearily. "I can't say it all over again. I think I am going to die—only I *must* live till Fred comes home."

I had not broken my fast that day, and I felt weak and wild, and scarcely grasped the meaning of the words I uttered to myself.

"Doctor Goldney has been sent for, ten miles out of the town, on a case of life and death. I cannot ask him; but I hope you will understand that, painful and distressing as it may be, it is better in every way that *you* should answer my questions."

"First, tell me if there is nothing we can do—when any one is—missing" (I said the word with a great effort, more gasping it out than speaking). "*How* are they searched for? *Who* searches?—is it the police?"

"Make your mind easy, young lady," said the old man, rather dryly, I thought. "The police have been on the track these two hours."

"You are very, *very* kind," I said, surprised and grateful; "that is acting like a real friend. I was too ignorant to think of things myself, and Doctor Goldney was so sure he would be home to breakfast."

"Will you tell me where he went when he left you last night?"

"Yes; to the billiard-rooms to meet your son, I am not sure whether they were to play, but he said he was obliged to go, and must be out for nearly an hour. Your son was with him; surely he must know—surely your son can tell where he is."

"My son went to London last night on business of mine. But when did your husband come back?"

"He never came back after that."

"Did he return from the bank yesterday at the usual time?"

"From the bank? Oh, yes—stay; no he, didn't; he was late for dinner."

"Is that usual?"

"Oh, dear, no! he was never late before; he always hurries home to me."

"And did he explain the reason?"

"No, he did not."

"Has he been quite in his usual spirits of late?—has it ever occurred to you that he had anything on his mind?"

I cast my thoughts back, and then I said, very sorrowfully—

"It never did occur to me; but now I think it over, there *were* little things now and then that look like it."

"And was he contented in his position?"

I was silent, and Mr. Fortescue repeated the question.

"I will not discuss those sort of things about my husband with a stranger." I then said, gently, "Why should I?"

"I am really asking the questions for his good. I should be *glad* of anything that made matters look favorable for him."

"I don't know what you mean. What occasion is there to make matters look favorable,

except to discover where he is ? Surely the being absent one morning from that wretched bank is not such a crime ? and I am *sure*—alas, alas ! I am *sure*—there is a good reason for it.”

“I am very much afraid there is too good a reason for it.”

“What do you mean ? Do you know anything ? Is he ill ? Is he hurt ?”

I sprang up as I spoke, and caught hold of the old man’s arm.

“I know nothing. As far as I am aware, he is neither ill nor hurt ; but I believe it will be best to tell you exactly what has happened.”

“If he is neither ill nor hurt you may tell me anything.”

“You will be greatly shocked, and I am very sorry for you ; but there is no good in concealing the truth : the bank has been robbed !”

“Has it ?” answered I, with listless apathy.

“Robbed,” he continued, “last night or this morning—robbed of nearly two hundred pounds in gold and silver, and a case of valuable diamonds which Lady Ormond had left in our keeping only that same day !”

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I made no answer. My thoughts were wandering away from what he said. I hardly heard the words. What was his loss of gold and silver or of Lady Ormond's diamonds to me?—to me, who had lost my husband?

"And at the same time Mr. Clare is missing—mysteriously disappears, and does not return all night. I am very sorry for you, young lady, but such are the circumstances of the case."

"And you want him to help find the thieves? and you are angry at his absence, and blame him on that account? Oh, how selfish people are! You think only of *that*, when you ought to be thinking only of what may have happened to *him*; and every minute we are talking here," I cried, wringing my hands in sudden agony, "his absence becomes more dreadful and more unaccountable. Oh, Fred, Fred!"

The banker looked at me steadily for a minute. "Do you really not see what I mean?" said he, speaking with reluctance. "Am I to understand that you really don't see what I mean?"

I stared about me in surprise. "No. What do you mean?" "Mean?" I said. "No. What do you mean?"

"I am extremely sorry to say," said Mr. Fortescue, slowly, "that your husband is suspected of having robbed the bank, and that there is a great deal of corroborative evidence against him, besides that which is almost conclusive—namely, his sudden disappearance from the town."

I was utterly silent, and for full a minute did not understand what had been said to me. Then I took it in, all at once, and again rose from my seat, but this time like a fury.

"How *dare* you!" I cried.

That was all I said; but I rang the bell violently—once, twice, and then again, till Martha came quickly in.

"Show this man out!" I cried; and I stood there like a queen, and signed towards the door.

"I assure you, Mrs. Clare——" he began.

"Don't dare to speak to me," I cried; "don't stay in my room—in my husband's room. Martha, show this man out."

And taking up his hat, and muttering to himself in an uncomfortable manner, the banker left my presence.

Somehow the strange reaction had done me

good. The indignation and disdain for the moment conquered the dreadful anxiety, and gave me a feeling that I insulted my husband by giving way, and that I had nothing to be miserable about. Under the influence of this feeling I broke some bread off the loaf and ate it, and drank some wine, and then I walked about the room, to get rid, if possible, by rapid exercise, of the excitement and passion I still felt.

"The wretch—the wicked, miserable old wretch," I cried over and over again, and then suddenly the sense of my desolation came over me. Where was my husband—my noble, upright, honorable husband? Where was he? Why was I deserted? Shall I never see him? never hear from him again? What could his absence mean? And I sank down on the floor, and cried till I could cry no longer.

I lay there motionless, I know not for how long, but the sun had left the back of the house, and was shining gaily in at the front windows before I was recalled to life by some one entering the room. I leapt to my feet with the word "Fred!" on my lips; but, alas! I only confronted Doctor

Goldney. He looked at me with compassionate eyes from head to foot ; and then he said, in a low, sad voice, " They have told you ? "

" No, no," I almost screamed, " they have not. What is it ? He is dead."

" He is *not* dead. I believe him to be alive and well."

" Then why do you look at me so ? "

" There are worse things than death," replied he, solemnly.

" There are *not* ; there is nothing in the world worse than death. If Fred is alive I care for nothing."

" Has no one told you anything ? . Poor child ! poor child !—has no one been with you all day ? "

" Not a creature, except that wicked old man."

" Wicked old man—what can you mean ? What wicked old man *can* have been with you ? "

" Only old Mr. Fortescue ; but never mind about him—what does he signify ? "

" And he told you ? "

" No, he told me nothing. He knew nothing. He thought only of his bank having been robbed, and he said false, horrible, wicked things. It is

too silly to mind them. It was the folly of a bad old man ; but it *does* make me so angry I can't bear to think of it."

" His bank *was* robbed last night, and the suspicion has fallen, naturally, on the clerk who has mysteriously disappeared. You can't wonder at that, Mrs. Clare."

" *What* clerk has disappeared ?"

" My dear Mrs. Clare, your husband has."

" But you are *not* telling me that the suspicion has fallen upon *him* ?"

" Who else *could* it fall on ?"

" Is it possible ?—is it really possible ? Oh, how wicked the world is ! Does any one really suspect *Fred* ? Oh, how shocking !—how wicked ! I thought it was only the folly of a superannuated old man."

" Mr. Fortescue is not superannuated or old ; he is one of the sharpest middle-aged gentlemen I am acquainted with."

" Then he is very, *very* wicked."

As I spoke, I began walking about the room in a state of the greatest excitement.

" It is shocking !—it is horrible !" I cried. " It

is too shocking. How are we to bear it? Doctor Goldney, *how* are we to bear it?"

"I want you, and my wife wants you, to come home to us for the present."

I thought of the she-dragon, and shook my head; besides, there was another reason.

"No; I could not leave this house. He might return any minute of the day or night. I must be here to receive him."

To receive him! What was I so calmly saying? Could I ever, indeed, hope to receive him in this life—in this world?

"Will you let me talk to you a little? May I ask you a few questions? Will you believe that I wish to be your friend, and that my only object is to help you?" said Doctor Goldney.

"Of course I will."

"I think Mr. Clare's father is a clergyman—the rector of Swinbourne, in Wiltshire?"

"Oh, yes; he is."

"Do you know how it happened that at three or four and twenty Mr. Clare took this clerkship?—had he been in the army and sold out? or what had been his previous career?"

"Oh, dear, no. He was at college, at Cambridge. He was to be a clergyman ; he was educated for that ; but when it came to the point, he was too good to take orders."

"Ah ! How do you mean, too good ?"

"He thought he should not make a proper sort of clergyman—he had been enjoying himself so much ; and he *wished* to enjoy life more than clergymen can."

"Ah !"

"His father was very angry, and quarrelled with him, and said very bad things about him, but he was too noble to yield."

Doctor Goldney's face grew longer, and the expression of it graver with every word I said, but I did not in the least know why.

"Are you intimate with the family ?—have you known them for years ?"

"I don't know one of them, except Polly and Pincher, who came to be bridesmaids."

"Are you long acquainted with Mr. Clare himself ?"

"Oh, dear, yes. Why, we have been married nearly five months." I hid my face as the

thought of those five months of exquisite happiness rushed over me.

“Yes,” said he, gently, “but before your marriage?”

“A few weeks. It was a short acquaintance and engagement, in point of time, but not in knowledge. I knew him better in a day than any one else I ever met, in a year.

“Still,” he said, speaking with extreme gentleness, “you will perceive that your acquaintance with him *is* very short, and that you know *very* little about his former life. Perhaps I am correct in saying that seven months ago you had never even heard his name?”

The first part of his speech did not make the slightest impression on me; the last struck home to my heart like a dagger.

“It is true,” I cried; “yet *there* is my whole life;” and overwhelmed by the thought of that life, I did not in the least understand the drift of all that he asked and said.

He waited till I became a little more composed.

“Do not think me impertinent if I ask you if he was in debt when you married—if you are in

debt now ? The trades-people have taken it up, and say you owe them money."

"Yes," I said, wearily ; " it doesn't signify much—I suppose we do. We did not understand keeping house very well, and I dare say we owe money. I meant to pay the bills monthly, but I didn't ; however, it can't be anything of consequence."

" And he was in debt when you married ?"

" I don't think so," I answered, languidly.
" He never told me so."

" He played billiards a good deal ?"

I made no reply to this. The whole conversation seemed to me unnecessary and puerile, and I felt no inclination to keep it up.

Then I said, " Has Mr. Jack Fortescue returned yet ? It was to meet him he went to the rooms ; he was the last person with him, and might tell us something."

" He has returned."

" Oh, and what does he say ?"

" Nothing. He did not meet him, and had no appointment to meet him."

" But that is not true, because Fred told me he had."

Doctor Goldney did not answer, but looked very grave.

"Mr. Fortescue had lent him money," he said, after a little silence.

I turned round astonished.

"Mr. Fortescue? Oh, no; that is a mistake, for Fred lent *him* money."

"He *told* you so," replied the doctor, with a curious emphasis on the words. I thought I saw what he meant, and fired up directly.

"Yes; but only because he couldn't help it. He had lent him fifteen pounds, and not *dreamt* of telling even me of it; but Mr. Fortescue came in one day when Fred was not at home, and borrowed five pounds more of *me*; and when I told Fred, it naturally came out how much he had lent him already."

Doctor Goldney did now look really astonished.

"Do you mean to say," he said, "that Mr. Fortescue borrowed five pounds of *you*, so that you *know* he really had it?"

"Yes; and fifteen more of Fred."

The doctor was standing at the window.

"There," he said, "he and his father are just

passing by the house. May I call them both in? It may help to clear up matters."

And, without waiting for permission, he spoke out of the window, and begged the two gentlemen to come up-stairs, and in another minute they were both in the room. I instantly turned to the younger man, and then I saw that he had really a great deal of feeling, for he looked quite haggard, and grew white as I spoke to him.

"Did you meet my husband at the billiard-rooms last night?" I cried, almost gasping for breath.

"No, indeed," he said, hastily. "I was preparing to go to London on business for my father, and I only came back to-day because he telegraphed for me."

"But you had appointed to meet him?"

He seemed confused, hesitated, and replied—"I don't know: something may have been said; I hardly remember."

"Tell her the truth," said Doctor Goldney; "don't be afraid. It's the best way of gradually preparing her mind for what *must* follow."

He spoke in a low voice, but I heard every

word. Whatever he meant by them it made no difference to Mr. Jack Fortescue, who still seemed fearfully embarrassed. Doctor Goldney cleared his throat, looked fixedly at the young man, as if giving him his cue, and said—

“You told your father and me that you had lent Mr. Clare money?”

Not a word from Mr. Jack Fortescue.

“You *could* not have said so,” I cried; “for you know he lent *you* money.”

Not a word.

“Pray, speak up, Jack, and tell the poor girl the truth,” said his father. “My son is afraid of hurting you, ma’am, but he never had a farthing from your husband; on the contrary, he *lent* him a great deal more than he had any business to do.”

I turned to Doctor Goldney.

“He *is* superannuated,” I whispered. Then I said to his son—

“Try to make your father understand—you know I gave you five pounds myself, and Fred gave you the other fifteen.”

“Mrs. Clare says she lent you five pounds,

because her husband, whom you had come to borrow it from, was out," said Doctor Goldney.

Then at last Mr. Jack Fortescue spoke, but still keeping his head down, and seeming painfully embarrassed.

"I *did* take five pounds from Mrs. Clare. I wanted it in a hurry before post-time. I came to see if Clare would give it me. I considered it as part payment of—of—his debt to me, but I didn't like to tell her so."

"Oh, I see," said Dr. Goldney. "That explains it, of course ; and I must say, Mr. Fortescue, the feeling you show in this very distressing affair does you credit, and raises you in my opinion. Don't you understand, my poor child," turning to me with great tenderness of manner, "he took that money because he had lent it to your husband? Oh, don't you begin to *see* the unhappy truth? Shall we have to *tell* you, and *prove* every successive step?"

"But it's not TRUE," said I ; "for Fred *told* me he had lent him fifteen pounds, and *I* lent him five, and that makes twenty."

"Your husband lost a deal of money to my son

at billiards," said the old gentleman, "and Jack, foolishly enough, lent him a deal more; and he was in debt when he married you—over head and ears in debt, he told my son so; and he owes money at every shop in the town. His habits were most extravagant—the kid gloves and scents alone that he bought without paying for would have supplied a regiment."

"The temptation was too much for him," said the son, hurriedly; "it haunted him; his brain could not stand it. I think—I do think—that he was not responsible for what he did; he was always speaking of taking the money. The drawers full of money haunted him. He talked of taking it till he could not help doing it. *Didn't* he talk of it, Mrs. Clare?" and he looked anxiously at me.

Yes, he did. How well I remembered it, and how it had vexed me, and I had begged him not. I felt puzzled and stupid, and answered like a person in a dream, "Yes, he did."

"Stuff and nonsense!" cried the banker; "haunted him! not responsible! couldn't help it! He could help it just as much as any other thief

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who covets his neighbor's goods till he takes them."

I still felt puzzled and stupid, and I turned in a sort of weary despair to Doctor Goldney.

"What do they mean?" I said. "I can't make out what they mean. Can you?"

"Yes," he replied, "I think I can; and when they are gone I will tell you. Now, you had better go away," he said to the two men, speaking very quickly. "Everything is only too miserably plain, and there is no good in prolonging this torture. I will make it all clear to her when you are gone, and take her home with me for the present."

The father and son left the room without saying another word, and Doctor Goldney and I were alone together.

"No; I can't go home with you," I said, in the same tired, languid way. "Why cannot I? I told you why. Yes; I remember. I must wait here for him—he may come any minute—any minute of the day or night."

Doctor Goldney made me sit down.

"Listen to me," he said. "He wont come."

"He wont come !"

"No. He has gone away ; he was obliged to go away. He has gone, we think, to—Australia."

"To Australia !"

"Yes ; and do you not see I cannot you in the least guess why ?"

"He has *not* gone. I am certain of it. He would never leave me."

"We are all prone to temptation—we are all sinners. Let us be merciful in our judgments of each other. Temptation has been too strong for *him*, and he has fallen."

"Who? Fred?"

"Yes, of course—your most unhappy husband. You can pray for him, Mrs. Clare. He is very young. He has a future before him. He may yet repent ; and you can pray for him."

"*Fred?*"

"You hardly understand me—you hardly take in what I say."

"I do not understand you in the least," I cried, pressing my two hands against my throbbing temples—"not in the least. Who has fallen?—who may repent?—who am I to pray for?"

"Your husband."

Then I began to laugh. How horrible the laughter sounded—even in my own ears !

"Why, what do you suppose he has done ?" I said, and I laughed again ; and the second laughter was more horrible than the first.

Doctor Goldney made me drink a glass of wine ; then he sat down beside me, took hold of my hand in his, and addressed me very solemnly.

"Remember how short a time you have known him ; how little you *can* know of his real character ; how he disappointed his father, and could not embrace the life of a clergyman ; how he worried you, covered with debts that he never told you of. Think of all this. Think, also, of how he saw heaps of money at the bank, day after day longing for them, and encouraging that longing by speaking of it, even to you. Overwhelmed by debt (he was threatened with arrest by one of his former creditors—so he told Jack Fortescue when he last borrowed money from him), overwhelmed by debt, shrinking from its consequences, not knowing where to turn or what to do, with weak principles and unsteady character, he yield-

ed to the fatal temptation" (here the doctor's voice sank almost to a whisper), "took the money and the jewels from the bank, and fled with them to a distant country!"

"HE DID NOT!" I cried, in a loud, shrill voice, and I sprang to my feet and lifted up the hand he had held so tenderly in his own, as if I would have struck him with it.

"He *did*, my poor girl—he did," said the doctor, rising too.

"You are a villain!" said I.

Doctor Goldney looked at me extremely astonished.

"Go away!" I cried: "I won't hear another word."

"You *must*," he said, "you must both hear and believe. The knowledge will be forced on you at last. It would be so much better if you would receive it now from a friend."

"A FRIEND!" I cried, with supreme disdain. "A villain—a villain to whom I will never speak another word as long as I live. Is *this* the way in which you dare to speak of an honorable gentleman with whom you are not fit to associate!"

Go away—go away this minute, or I will have you turned out of the house !”

“ If I go,” said the doctor, very kindly, “ it will only be because I think it best for *you*. It *is* best that you should be left alone to think over and become accustomed to ideas that at present overwhelm you ; but I shall come back when I fancy you may find some comfort in seeing me.”

I drew myself up to my full height, and spoke calmly and disdainfully.

“ I will never see you again, sir. I thought you were an honorable man. I find you are not. I shall never become *accustomed* to the base ideas you thrust before me. I will never speak to you again. For the present this is my house. I desire you to leave it, and not to return.”

“ I obey you in leaving it,” said he, gently ; “ but I am not in the least offended, and I *shall* return.”

“ You will not be admitted,” I replied, still quite calmly ; “ and may I beg now that you will go at once. The presence of such a man as you are is, necessarily, painful to a *lady*.”

He bowed gravely and went, I ringing the bell

with grave politeness, equal to his own, being for the moment vividly awake to the etiquette of society. As he went, Mrs. Crumpledum, answering the bell, I suppose, came into the room.

"It was only to show Mr. Goldney out," I said, and I stood erect in the middle of the apartment, proud, calm, and cold.

"And if I can 'elp you in any way, my dear, I will," said Mrs. Crumpledum ; and I'm not a-going to turn you out or clamor for my money. He was the beautifullest young gent I ever 'ad dealings with, and the pleasantest-spoken by a long chalk ; and if he *did* take the money—laws, they didn't ought to leave gold and diamonds about to tempt young gents with—they didn't ought."

"He didn't take it, Mrs. Crumpledum."

"Didn't he, sure, now ?" replied my landlady. "Well, he didn't, then, and sarve 'em right if he did ; and you just stay quietly here till he sends for yer, and he'll send money enuf to pay up all scores, I'll be bound, when he sees his way a bit in the new country ; for, laws, he worships the ground you treads on, my dear, *he* does, and he never meent for to desart yer—never !"

"He has not gone anywhere," I said.

"Hasn't he, now ? Then he'll be back, maybe, all the sooner ; but you stay quietly here, my dear, and don't fret yourself ; and I've the finest and the fattest pork chops you ever seed. I'll fry 'em for your dinner myself, with liver sarce that might console a queen."

CHAPTER XII.

“ ALETHEIA.”

IT was not then that I became ill—at least it was not then that I gave up, and had to lie in bed in a darkened room, and could not even think. But I believe I was just as ill really for days before this happened. Fever burned in my veins, and was my one companion all the long day and all the longer night. My eye was bright, my cheek had a hot color in it, and I was always restlessly busy; there was so much to do—so much to do to defend his character and clear his memory. I had to pay every farthing that we owed, that no one might say he had been in debt or difficulty. I sent for all the bills, collected them in from every creature who could claim a penny from us. I counted over my slender stock of money; then I returned to the London

jeweller my beautiful watch and chain, and some of the rings and brooches—presents I had received with girlish triumph before my happy wedding-day (ah ! so short a time ago), but not one of Fred's gifts. Everything that I had been given by him I hoarded with a miser's care, and in exchange for the others I got more than seventy pounds. With this, and what I had before, I paid every debt we had incurred ; so that I knew the feeling of the place would turn and be in Fred's favor. Mrs. Crumpledum stood my firm friend. I forced her to say downright, in so many words, that she believed in my husband's innocence ; afterwards, I had reason to think that in doing so I forced her to tell a lie, but her intentions were good ; so I hope it was forgiven to her ; and I had told her, quite as if it was a threat, that I would not stay under her roof unless she said so. Martha was not so easily persuaded to say what I wished. But then Martha was not conversable ; besides which, she was only a servant, and I felt it would degrade Fred even to inquire what she thought. Once or twice, when waiting on me, I found her eyes fixed

on my face, and as she withdrew them, she muttered audibly, "*That's* why I never married." But the second time this happened I told her that if it occurred again I should complain to Mrs. Crumpledum, and probably leave the house ; so after that she only looked it.

One day Mr. Wilkinson called at the door and sent up his card by Mrs. Crumpledum, who told me he wished much to be allowed to see me. I looked doubtfully first at the card and then at her.

"What did he say?" I asked.

"No man could speak kinder like," said Mrs. Crumpledum, stoutly.

"But what did he say?"

"He said, ma'am, as 'ow he 'oped you'd let him speak consolation to you, as fittin' and right it was, and that he was not one of those men 'ou confounded the innercent wife with her guilty pardner."

I threw the card on the floor in utter disdain.

"I see him?" I cried. "Tell him, Mrs. Crumpledum, that I will see no one who is not justly indignant at the false and wicked charge that Mr. Fortescue has made against my husband."

After that I heard no more about Mr. Wilkinson.

All this time I never left the house. Mrs. Crumpledum tried hard to persuade me to go out, but I would not. I could not bear it. To step outside the door and stand again under the blue summer heaven I thought would kill me. I never read a line of any book—I never did a stitch of any work. At first I was busy collecting and paying bills, as I have stated, and the transactions with the jeweller kept me employed and excited. After that I made an agreement with my landlady that I would give her thirty shillings a-week, instead of a pound, for which sum she undertook to board me, sending up my meals without my ordering anything; and I ate so little that I think I paid her quite enough. When I attempted to swallow food it seemed to choke me, and often I could taste nothing during the day but bread and fruit, and sometimes, perhaps, a little soup; and the fever burned in my veins, and my eye was bright, and a hot color shone on my cheek. I was always expecting Fred to return, or that a letter would come from him. There were two deliveries of letters in the

day, and sometimes it seemed to me that they were all I lived for ; for when the morning post failed me I just went on waiting for the other ; and when the evening post brought me no letter, I only said, "Ten o'clock to-morrow morning." I spent most of my time walking about the rooms and looking out of the window, then again walking about the rooms and looking out of the window.

Twenty times I would leave my bed in the night and steal into the sitting-room to draw aside the curtains and strain my eyes along the road leading to the corner of High Street—strain my eyes in vain. One disappointment followed another, but still I always felt, and believed, and said to myself, "Sometime while I am looking, I shall see him come."

I begged Mrs. Crumpledum never to be without something better in the house than I cared to take, so that if he came in hungry and tired there might be a comfortable meal ready for him. I kept his clothes aired, and the one extravagance I allowed myself was to take in his favorite newspaper. I never read it myself, but I felt as if,

should I give up taking it in, it would seem as if I did not really expect him.

I rejoiced from the bottom of my heart in what other people considered my friendless condition. I had so few relations, and not one of them in England. Miss Gibbons might have wished to be kind to me, but she was away. The only person who, under the circumstances, I could have sent for, or who could have insisted on my coming to her, my Aunt Dolly, was spending the summer in France. I *was* able to live alone, but had any one been with me I think I must have died. One heart-broken letter came to me from Fred's father. He offered me a home if I preferred coming to them to going to any of my own friends; but in it he spoke of his unfortunate and guilty son, and of the miserable effects of his early extravagance and unfortunate marriage. I passed my pen through the terrible words, and wrote across the letter—"I cannot hold communication with any one to whom it is necessary to say he is innocent," and so I returned it to that hard and faithless man, who, blessed with such a son, had never understood or trusted him.

Days passed, I believe weeks passed, but I kept no count of time, and still my husband did not return to me, and still no letter reached me from him. I became more restless than ever. I was always hot, and always felt a busy, hurried feeling in my brain, as if there was something I had to do, and to do quickly, or there would not be time enough for me to do it. Not time enough!—alas, when my empty hands lay in my lap, and I had *only* leisure!

At last, one morning Mrs. Crumpledum came into the sitting-room with a very grave face.

“My dear 'art,” she said, “there's been a accident.”

My hot, parched lips grew white and deadly cold. I moved them, and at last they uttered a sound—“Fred!”

“Poor innercent!” said she. “Laws! what these men 'ave to answer for! Fred, Fred! it's nothin' but Fred. I was never 'alf so far gone with my Crumpledum, though he'd 'ave made two of your man—he would. Well-a-day! ma'am, it's not that at all; but it's the young gent at the bank 'as met with a accident.”

"Has he?" I was listless again.

"Yes, he 'as. He be throwed from his 'oss and taken up for dead; and his 'ead and jaw be crushed, they do say, and he can 'ardly speak, though he baint dead, and 'as comed to hisself like; and the servant-man is 'ere, ma'am, and he says the only words the young gent utters is callin' for you."

"For me? Oh, you must be mistaken."

"It's no mistakes of mine, ma'am; leastways it's what the servant-man do say."

"It's not possible, Mrs. Crumpledum, and I can't go. I have never left the house *since*, and I can't."

"The old gent is like as if he was ravin', ma'am, and it be he who sent the servant-man for you."

"It must be some mistake, and I can't go."

"Mr. Jack isn't a good 'un, he isn't; he be a bad sort, he be; but still, if a gent be taken up for dead, and 'is jaw crushed, and 'is old father, what is 'spectable, ravin', I *do* think those that is sent for should go."

A tap at the drawing-room door. I looked towards it in a startled way, but did not say "Come

in." It opened without the permission, and Doctor Goldney entered. My anger rose as I saw a man of whom I had such a very bad opinion.

"I am greatly surprised, Doctor Goldney, that you should come here again," I cried instantly.

"It can't be helped, Mrs. Clare, and I told you I *should* come. However, it is about something else now. Good God! my poor girl, how ill you look! But I am here now in the way of business. They have told you that a man who I believe is dying has sent for you. You can't refuse to come."

"A dyin' man, my dear 'art," said Mrs. Crumple-dum; "don'tee you refuse. They be the sorts that turn into ghosts and come back again if they're crossed, they be. Don'tee you make a ghost, my dear—don'tec, now!"

"It is very cruel," I said. "Why should he want me? Oh, I must go, I suppose."

And I took out of its drawer and put once more on my head the coquettish little hat and feather, in which Fred used to tell me I looked so pretty. I regarded myself earnestly in the glass. Hag-

gard, worn, thin face—was it mine? Was this the face that Fred had kissed and loved? And that hat and feather? What business had it there?—it, so gay and fanciful? And I—I?—what was I?—who was I?—living here in a lodging by myself? What did it mean? What *could* it mean? Where was my husband? Was he dead? and what did I do here?

I walked quickly back into the sitting-room.

"Look at this hat and feather, Doctor Goldney," I said, quietly. "Is it not a mistake?—is it not all wrong? Ought not I to have a widow's cap? I must not go out without one! May I?"

He looked at me steadily and compassionately.

"Oh, yes," he replied, "you may. You are not a widow, you know."

"Am I not?" I said, with a little laugh. "Oh, very well. Come along, then. Where are we going? *Is* it to anybody's funeral? Oh, my poor head!—it is in such a whirl; but I think I oughtn't to go out without a widow's cap."

"Put a veil on," he said, "and come with me. The air will do you good. You have been shut up too long."

"Too long?" said I; "too long? Too late—too late! It is always too late?"

After that I was walking rapidly somewhere, and then I was in a room—a room with a bed in it, and a man in that bed, and an old man standing by the bedside, with tears on his face. I felt as if that was wrong.

"Why does that old man cry?" I said to Doctor Goldney. "It is only the young that suffer—only the young—only the young!"

The man in bed was something dreadful to look at. His face and head were all bound up in some shocking manner, with only his eyes staring out—staring out at me—always at me.

"Don't let him," I cried; "he mustn't do it. It isn't Fred."

"I have brought her," said the doctor, "but she is hardly herself. I couldn't have asked her if I had not thought a new emotion might do her good. Oh, the misery that follows on one false step!"

"Mrs. Clare has come, my boy," said the old man, bending tenderly over the dreadful creature in the bed. "What do you want to say to her?"

"Why, it's old Fortescue !" I said ; and then I laughed a little.

"That is Mr. Jack Fortescue in bed," said Doctor Goldney to me, in a low voice, and speaking very slowly and distinctly, as if I were a child or a fool, and he wanted to make me understand something above my comprehension. "He has been thrown from his horse, and he is very anxious to say something to you."

"Oh, yes," I replied, suddenly recollecting, "of course he is. I know all about *that* ; but *what* is it ? I don't know what it is. Do I ?"

"No one knows," cried his father, despairingly ; "and the poor fellow is past speaking, I believe. Jack, my dear boy, here is Mrs. Clare. Shall she go away ?—you don't want her, do you ? She may go away ? You won't be exciting yourself about her again ?" Then the creature in the bed made a violent convulsive effort, partly heaved itself up, gasped, panted, and uttered in a sort of scream the one word, "Aletheia !"

I think the bandages must have burst from his head as he did so, for Doctor Goldney suddenly put me outside the door, and left me there, implor-

ing me in earnest accents to go home ; and as he did so, I saw the father, the poor father (a strange sort of pity seemed springing up in my heart for him), catch the creature in his arms, and cry out, "They have given way ; he has killed himself !"

I don't know what happened next or how I got home ; but I did get home, for I was lying on the sofa in my sitting-room, and by and by Doctor Goldney was again with me. I thought I was dreaming, and I found myself saying to him, "Is it not odd that these dreams seem to me just exactly as if I was awake ?"

"Yes, very odd," he replied.

"But I am *not* awake," I said, "because if I was I would not suffer you to be in the room for an instant."

"I am so sorry that you are still angry with me. I want to help you, and do what I can for you."

"I shall want help," I answered, "but I will not let *you* help me. Do you know that I have been going mad for a long time ? I know it, and I don't mind."

"No, no," he replied, soothingly.

"I don't mind now ; I think it's almost better. I did mind very much indeed ; because I had such a horrid fear that when I was mad I might say Fred robbed the bank. Mad people *do* say what they don't think. I know they do. But I've done nothing but pray to God that I might never, *never*, say it (I know I couldn't *think* it if I was ever so mad), and I've prayed so much that I *feel* I shan't. It is all so sorrowful, so very sorrowful, and yet God is kind. He made Fred good, and He made me believe in him ; and what does all the rest—all the rest—all the rest, matter ?"

I was very much surprised to see tears falling from Doctor Goldney's eyes.

"Do all the men cry?" I said ; "and I never cry at all. It used to be women that cried, not men."

And now everything grew confused, and strange, and dim, and I can give no connected account of it. I knew Aunt Dolly was there, and it did not surprise me—nothing surprised me. I noticed nothing, and cared for nothing. Sometimes I knew Doctor Goldney came in, and sometimes he talked to Aunt Dolly. Sometimes Aunt

Dolly seemed frightened, and cried ; and I wondered why any one should care enough for anything to be frightened at it, or to cry about it. I heard Doctor Goldney say, "She is not mad—it is not madness ; it is simply a brain fever."

And then I said in a loud, distinct voice—

"It is *not*. It is a broken heart."

And Aunt Dolly screamed, and cried, "Oh, Georgy, Georgy !" but I hid my face under the bedclothes, and would not look at her.

For I was in bed, always in bed, and yet it did not seem to me as if I was there. The well-known room was as nought to me. I was in a ship at sea. Whether waking or sleeping I was in a ship at sea, moving on, and on, and on, with a steady, see-saw swing, through an ocean of rolling waters. I liked it ; I felt it was right, and that it was bringing about something that was to be. I was not going away—oh, no. My ship was not rushing further and further from the goal I cared for, but nearer, and nearer, and nearer. Was it my ship? Was it I who was in it? or was it some one — some one who was coming to me?

"What is 'Aletheia?'" I suddenly said one day.

"Ah, doctor," cried Aunt Dolly, "I am glad you heard her ask that question. If she has said 'Aletheia' once since I came, she has said it a hundred times. Sometimes in the middle of the night she just cries out 'Aletheia, Aletheia!' till it makes my flesh creep. At first I thought she meant Allelujah; but I think it's the name of the heroine of an old novel I once read."

"It's what that poor fellow said to her," replied the doctor. "Nothing would satisfy him but he must see her; he had something he *must* say. For my part, I really fancied he had something to *confess*, strange as it seems. I thought he had a burthen on his conscience. Then when she came he was like a distracted creature, trying to speak, and at last all he said was 'Aletheia.'"

"And I suppose it has haunted her since," said Aunt Dolly, "as it was the last thing that happened before she was taken ill."

"The scene altogether was too much for her over-wrought brain. I thought it would give a turn to her thoughts; but I made a mistake in taking her. However, this must have come on all

the same : it only hastened the moment of her giving in a little."

"What is 'Aletheia?'" I repeated, suddenly.

"It is a woman's name," said Aunt Dolly, greatly flurried.

"It is a Greek word signifying Truth," said Doctor Goldney, soothingly.

"It is NOT!" I replied, in a loud voice. "It is the name of a ship."

"She is always talking of a ship at sea," said Aunt Dolly, complainingly.

"But that's very odd," cried the doctor, looking blankly at Aunt Dolly; "for 'Aletheia' is the name of a ship that was here not long ago. Where was that ship bound for, I wonder? Jack Fortescue, poor fellow, was always a great rogue! Is it possible he can have been behind the curtain all this time, and knows where—" Here he stopped short, looked with astonishment and appeal into Aunt Dolly's face, and murmured softly, "God bless my soul! how extraordinary!"

"I really don't know what you mean, doctor," said Aunt Dolly, fretfully.

"No wonder, ma'am, for I don't know myself.

Never mind—never mind! The least said the soonest mended. I'm sure nobody ought to take advantage of what anybody says."

With which very general assertions Aunt Dolly appeared quite satisfied.

I hardly know how much of all that was said I heard and comprehended at the time, or how much was told me afterwards in the days that were to come; but I now write down what I know, be it in one way or be it in another that I acquired the knowledge.

Oh, weary days and nights in which the ship went on and on—for ever on—for ever and for ever!—oh, weary days and nights!

At last, one morning I was no longer in the ship—I was no longer moving in a see-saw swing over the rolling waters. I was still and stationary, lying in a bed in a room—in my own bed, in my own room, propped up by pillows, and Aunt Dolly sitting in a chair by my side, knitting.

I regarded her steadily, and when I met her eye I smiled. She stooped down and kissed me.

"You are so much better to-day, Georgy," she said, caressingly, "and so you were yesterday and

last night, but to-day you look quite yourself. You have been getting better gradually. Will it tire you to speak, dear?"

"No, Aunt Dolly," I replied, faintly.

She kissed me again.

Then she brought me breakfast, and I ate and drank, and then lay quietly looking about me, wondering if I had been dreaming of that ship—if I had never left this bed and this room—if I had only been ill. Presently Doctor Goldney came in.

"She is *quite* herself to-day," cried Aunt Dolly.

"That's right," said he, cheerily. We shall do well enough now."

And he came up to the side of the bed, but I shrank away from him, and looked reproachfully at Aunt Dolly.

"Don't let him come," I said.

"My love," replied she, "it is your kind doctor, the best friend any poor sick girl ever had."

"No, no, no!" I cried; and then whispered softly to her, "he is a bad man."

Aunt Dolly turned sadly to the doctor, and put her finger on her forehead.

"Not at all," he replied. "On the contrary, it

"ALETHEIA."

is a sign that she is *all there*, as they say in my part of the country. Mrs. Clare had a quarrel with me, I regret to say, but we will not enter into it to-day. She must suffer my presence till she no longer requires my services, and then I will rid her of it if she wishes."

"I had *much* rather not," I replied, as firmly as I could; "it is *very* disagreeable to me. If I *could* recover without you, I would so much rather you did not come."

"Oh, Georgy, my child! cried Aunt Dolly, and nobody was ever so kind as he has been. What *can* you have quarrelled with him about?"

"Don't you know?" I said; "and how his coming at all is an insult? He doesn't believe in Fred."

"Oh—h!" said Aunt Dolly, and her countenance fell, and an expression of dismay came into it.

Meantime, Doctor Goldney had made himself master of my wrist, and was feeling it.

"Never mind," he said; "we wont discuss matters now. She's doing as well as possible, and may dispense with the doctor, but she had

better avoid argument for the present. Give her plenty of nourishing food, and don't let her worry herself, and I'll not come unless I'm sent for, and you need not send for me unless she doesn't gain strength."

"I am so sorry, doctor—so very sorry," began Aunt Dolly, mournfully, but he was gone before she could finish her sentence.

For a day or two I went on very well, but I did not feel inclined to talk or exert myself in any way. My appetite was tolerable, and I regained strength with the rapidity with which youth and a naturally good constitution does regain it. I was allowed to sit up, and Aunt Dolly began to talk of my returning home with her when I was well enough.

"No," I said, "I can't do that. It is kind of you to wish it, but I can't. I must wait here for him; it is here he will come."

Aunt Dolly looked miserable, and turned quite crimson.

"He would never come here," she said.

"Oh, yes," I replied, "he may come any minute of the day or of the night."

"My *dear* Georgy—my *poor* child!" said Aunt Dolly; and then she stopped and looked about her in the greatest perplexity.

"Do you know anything of him?" I cried, with that sudden terror of his death in my heart, which was always lying there ready to spring into life at their ambiguous words.

"I?" she cried, "God forbid! no, nothing."

"Aunt Dolly," I said, with sudden solemnity, "you believe he is innocent?"

"Oh, Georgy!"

"You *do* believe it."

"Oh, Georgy, Georgy!"

"Come to me, Aunt Dolly. Look in my face. You have not the heart to tell me you don't believe he is innocent?"

She had not the heart. She came to me, she looked in my face as I desired her (she was always a bidable little woman), and then I thought she was going to faint.

"Now, listen to me, Aunt Dolly," I said. "You and I must part if you can't tell me that you believe he is innocent. I must not be friends with any one who is not his friend. I am his

wife. Oh, Aunt Dolly, I was so happy ! He is good, noble, honorable, perfect ! Who shall know him if I do not ? Think of him as he was when we were married. Think how fond you were of him."

"I *was* fond of him," she replied, beginning to cry.

"*Be* fond of him still," I cried. "There is nobody like him—nobody ! Trust him as I do—oh, trust him, trust him !—you must, you shall !—you *will* ?—won't you ?" I added, suddenly pleading.

"I *will*, Georgy !" cried Aunt Dolly, despairingly.

I kissed her hands—I think I could have kissed her feet if she would have let me.

"Good Aunt Dolly," I cried, "I must have turned you out if you hadn't ! He *is* good—he *is* innocent—I KNOW it ! How glad you will be that you trusted him, when you *find* he is. It is so sad, so *very* sad, that nobody will trust him, only you and I—only two women who can do nothing."

"There are such proofs," began Aunt Dolly, in a miserable voice.

"*ALETHEIA*."

"Proofs!" I cried. "If an angel came from heaven and accused him they ought not to believe it; any one who had ever known him ought not. Cannot you understand now, why I think so *very* badly of Doctor Goldney?"

"But you wouldn't expect, my dear Georgy—you really couldn't, expect—a man couldn't believe in face of all the proofs."

"But you do!"

"Oh, I am only a woman," sighed Aunt Dolly. "Women can *not* believe, or believe almost anything, if they try; but men—you *can't* expect it of *men*."

"I wonder why women are so much stronger than men?" said I, sighing in my turn.

"Is it being stronger?" asked Aunt Dolly, simply.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE END.

A FEW days more, and I could get up every day and move languidly about the house. I allowed myself to be settled each morning in the sitting-room, and I tried to eat when Aunt Dolly pressed me, but I steadily refused ever to go out. I said always that I could not.

“The only time I went out it drove me mad,” I cried with a shudder, “and I should go mad again—I know I should. As I put my hat on my head I began to go mad—I did, Aunt Dolly—indeed I did. Don’t ask me.”

Poor thing ! she never did ask me after that. On the contrary, I think what I said about my hat frightened her, and she hid it somewhere away very carefully for fear I should put it on my head again. Poor gentle, timid Aunt Dolly !

you were very good to me in those miserable days ; and how I have loved you ever since for the sake of them !

Doctor Goldney never came near me, but I know now that he called sometimes in the morning before I was up (I still breakfasted in bed), and that it was from him Aunt Dolly acquired sundry little bits of information that she, in the course of the day, would impart to me.

Thus, she told me that Mr. Jack Fortescue was really likely to recover. He had lain a long time (all the while I was ill) between life and death, speechless, and seldom conscious ; but at last he had rallied, and though he only spoke a word now and then, and they could not at all judge of the state of his mind or memory, he had certainly recognized his father, and seemed to understand any simple question about his physical feelings that was put to him.

"I can't bear to think of him," I said, hiding my face ; "I shiver all over if I think of him."

"You were so frightened that day," said Aunt Dolly, soothingly.

"I don't believe it's *that*," I replied ; "it's a

horror—a *fear*—I have of him. It seems to me as if he was *dreadfully* wicked, and had—I can't tell you what ; and then I get frightened at myself for thinking such a thing. But, oh, Aunt Dolly, I *do* think it—I believe I do."

"But what is it you think?"

"I don't know. I shouldn't care if I knew. It is something as if—I can't tell what—as if—oh, must I say it?—as if he was the cause of all. I know he isn't, and that he can't be ; but it is a sort of haunting horror that comes upon me, and that I can't get rid of. Oh, why did he say 'Aletheia'?" I cried, wringing my hands, and rising from my seat in great agitation. "Why did he say 'Aletheia'?"

"Don't, darling Georgy!" cried Aunt Dolly, getting off hers also, and almost as agitated as myself. "It's only the fancies you had while you were ill ; you'll get rid of them quite, by degrees."

"Oh, if it was only that !—if it was only that !" I said, very sorrowfully.

"Do you know," said she, trying to divert my thoughts, "you do him no injustice in thinking

him wicked. He has been very extravagant, and a bad young man in many ways, and has nearly broken his poor father's heart. He was engaged two or three years ago to a Miss Gibbons, and—"

"Miss Gibbons! Why she is old enough to be his mother!"

"That is the elder sister—it is one much younger; and the engagement was broken off in consequence of something very bad indeed that was discovered about him, and his father sent him away, and he was in great disgrace for a time. Lately he has been taken into the bank, and is going on better; and, just before this accident, he had made an offer again to Miss Fanny Gibbons, but she will have nothing to say to him, and indeed his doing so does not look very well, for it was just after she was left some money."

"She is quite right," I said, warmly. "I never could understand a girl marrying a man she did not *feel* was noble!"

Aunt Dolly sighed.

"Men have such temptations!" she said.

Then we fell into one of those silences which,

notwithstanding all her kind efforts, might be described as our normal condition.

I walked restlessly about the room. At last I said very quietly, "I wonder how much longer I shall be able to bear it."

"Oh, Georgy, don't talk so!" she cried.

"But I *do* wonder," I said, pressing both my hands on my heart. "It can't go on, you know, much longer, *can* it; and if nothing *does* happen, how am I to bear it? I *can't* bear it, you know, Aunt Dolly," I continued, still speaking very quietly, and as if I was reasoning with her.

"You frighten me, Georgy. If you would come out sometimes—if you would only take a little walk—"

"But how can I?" I cried, with sudden excitement, amounting almost to anger. "How can I, when he may come any minute, and I must be here to receive him — when he may come any minute — any minute of the day or the night?"

As I spoke, I turned my back on Aunt Dolly, and faced the mirror over the mantel-piece, and, looking earnestly into it at my pale face, I restlessly moved about the ornaments on the shelf.

The door of the room was in the wall exactly behind me, and as I looked as if "through the looking-glass," it opened, and there, in the depths of the mirror, I beheld as distinctly as if it was indeed real, Fred come into the room—Fred, just like himself, only with eager, longing eyes, unlike his own. Those eyes met mine in the glass, and I gave a loud scream. Aunt Dolly rushed up to me, looked, and screamed also. She saw him too ! I would not remove my spell-bound gaze for one second, because I knew if I turned round the vision would be gone ; but she was different. She left my side, and did she really run up to him, or was it only part of the spectral illusion, and was she forming another figure in this supernatural phantasmagoria ? In the wonderful mirror I *saw* her run up to him and seize his hand, but the next instant he was behind me—his living arms were about me — I turned round to be folded to his breast, and to feel his warm kisses on my face. It was Fred—it was my husband—my own. He was alive—he was safe—he had come back to me. For one moment I was as if in heaven. Then I knew no more — I had fainted in his arms. I

thought it was death, but in the ecstasy of that moment I was content even to die. When I came to myself I was on the sofa, but I was still in his arms, and he was still kissing me.

He was speaking apologetically to Aunt Dolly.

"They told me she was in her room, and that you were here alone, and I thought you would break it to her."

"Then I should not have been *first*," I cried, opening my happy eyes only to see the beloved face. "Oh, Fred, Fred! I saw you before she did."

"My darling, my darling!" was all the reply I received *in words*.

Aunt Dolly retired into the window to cry, and for a few minutes Fred and I were in heaven.

It was long before anybody thought of asking or giving an explanation. Where had he been?—what did it matter?—he was *here*. Why did he go?—what did that matter either?—he was *here*.

At last it was Aunt Dolly who said very timidly—

"Are you *safe*, my dear boy?"

"Safe?" said Fred, astonished. "Why not?"

"The—bank?" said she, hesitating as much as if she had to utter an improper word.

"Why, what can old Fortescue do to me?" said he, laughing.

I covered his hand, which I still held in both mine, with kisses.

"How *delightful* it is," I cried, "to hear you talking of old Fortescue!"

"The police!" said Aunt Dolly, with a great gasp.

"Why, they wouldn't take me up for absence without leave, would they?" cried Fred, laughing; "that would be rather hard lines on a poor kidnapped chap!"

"Kidnapped?" sighed I. "Oh, Fred, tell us, tell us. "We know nothing."

"No, of course you don't, darling," said he; "how should you? But I forgot *that*. My dear Georgy, my adventures are the most wonderful and incomprehensible things you can imagine. They would make the fortune of a sensational novelist, and they actually happened to this poor little cove in the nineteenth century." And he smiled at us with his sweet boyish smile, and

with that look of quaint humor in his eyes which I knew so well, and which, when I saw it again after all these weary weeks, I welcomed by immediately bursting into tears.

These tears, of course, had to be kissed away, and I was petted and soothed till I was calm. Calm? Oh, what a happy girl I was! Was it worth while to have lost him for the sake of this joy?—Alas, no! The loss was too dreadful—*so* dreadful that I was already beginning to feel as if it never *could* have been.

“Jack Fortescue—” began Fred.

“Ah!” I cried, and hid my eyes.

“Jack Fortescue,” he continued, “was in difficulties, and made up his mind to cut and run, and try a new life in Australia. He took me into his confidence. Do you remember, my Georgy, the big ship you saw in the moonlight that night from the bridge? Well, he had written to London and taken a berth in her—the ‘Aletheia.’”

Aunt Dolly cried out, and I said, “One could not but be sure it meant something.”

“What?” asked he.

“Oh, never mind, darling. First of all, tell

your story, and afterwards we will explain everything."

"Will you, by Jove?" said Fred. "I'm glad of that, for there's a precious lot I want to have explained. Very well. I was to see him on board, and he was to give me a letter at starting, making it all as smooth as he could with that poor old bird his father. Now, then, Georgy, you'll hardly believe what I've got to tell you. I left you that night—ah! my love, you remember?—I went on board with him. As we were going down the staircase (the companion, you know), my foot caught, and down I came, and smashed something in my leg. Jack got me into his cabin, and said whiskey was the thing, and he gave me a dose, I nothing loth, but he looked as white as a sheet, and trembled all over. Deuce take me if I don't believe he put something in it! I became insensible at once, and knew nothing at all till I found myself put to bed in a place narrow enough to be my coffin, in a good deal of pain, and rushing on somewhere at the rate of ten knots an hour."

"But how—how *could* it have happened?"

"How, indeed? I hardly expect you to believe me. I hardly believe myself. My leg had got a nasty wrench, and I was nearly three weeks before I could stand upon it again. But what they told me was this—Jack Fortescue seems to have said *I* was the passenger going to Australia, and *he* was the friend coming to see me off. There was no mistake about it. He didn't die in a fit; he didn't fall overboard and get drowned, but he just stepped into the boat that had brought us aboard, and went on shore again. And that's all I know to this day of the matter."

"Oh, Fred!" cried I, kissing his dear hand, "you have been vilely used."

"Have I, by Jove?" cried he. "*If* I have I'll know the reason why; but I'll condemn no man unheard."

"If others were as noble as you! But *you* were condemned unheard. They said—. Aunt Dolly, you tell him. I can't—I can't put it into words. You tell him, please."

Fred sat up, ready to be told, all expectation, looking rather like a patient in a dentist's chair.

"The bank was robbed that night," said Aunt

Dolly, getting very pale, and trembling a little—"robbed of diamonds and money, and—they say—you—robbed it!"

Fred turned crimson. "What a beastly shame!" said he, and that was all he said.

There was a minute's silence, during which I quietly went on kissing his hand. He looked at me with ineffable tenderness, and laying his other hand on my head, stroked my hair.

"*She* didn't believe them," he said, softly.

I raised my proud, happy face to his, and laughed and cried at once.

"They don't know me, you see," he said, apologetically.

Aunt Dolly was looking at him very anxiously and inquiringly all this time, and as he spoke his honest blue eyes met hers, full. They never flinched for a moment, and kept their sweet, open expression, unruffled even by what he had just heard. Then she all of a sudden burst out crying, and began kissing him, and crying over him as if she had been his mother.

"And *I* didn't believe them, my dear boy," she said, over and over again.

Had she really had faith in him *till* that moment? Poor Aunt Dolly!

"We will go away from this base town," I cried, "where they don't know an honorable man when they see him. And oh, Fred, if you will credit it, even Doctor Goldney thought—" I could not finish my sentence, but gave a great sob instead.

"And why shouldn't he?" replied Fred, to my utter astonishment. "What on earth does he know of me, Georgy? And I'll tell you what, my dear, it did look uncommonly fishy if there was a robbery at the bank the very night I disappeared. It did look uncommonly fishy—I must own that it did."

"I never will forgive any of them," said I.

"What news of my father and mother?" asked Fred. "How are they all at Swinbourne?"

"*He* hadn't faith in you," I cried, bitterly.

"Hadn't he, though?" said Fred. "I'm sorry for that. Poor old governor! he's such a very nervous, timid old bird he couldn't have faith in anybody; but it must have made him no end uncomfortable, and I wish he could have trusted me."

"I never can like any one again who didn't," said I.

"Oh yes, you can, darling, in a little time, when the sharp edge wears off," replied Fred, coolly.

"There are none of them worthy to tie your shoes," cried I, indignantly; "and they dared—"

"I'll tell you what, Georgy," said Fred, "they none of them *know* me. Why on earth should they take me for granted? If a new footman disappeared, and the spoons ditto at the same time, his master and mistress, and all the neighborhood, could come to only one conclusion—that they had decamped together. But I'll tell you who would have had perfect faith in me if you could have got hold of them—all the fellows who knew me at school or at college, they'd not have doubted me—not one of them for one minute."

The whole mystery of Fred's disappearance was explained and made clear to the satisfaction of everybody. How ashamed all must have felt who doubted him! How they must have wished they had shown a little more nobleness in their

own characters, and a little more power of perception into the characters of others ! I could not help triumphing to myself when I thought how low and small they must have felt. But Fred was so heroic he did not triumph one bit, and he was sincerely sorry for "old Fortescue."

"It's an awful bore," he said, "that one can't clear one's self without blackguarding another fellow !"

The facts of the case were as follows :—

Mr. Jack Fortescue had for some time determined to run away secretly to Australia, and try to begin a new life in a new country. He had debts he could not pay, and which must, before long, come to his father's knowledge ; and besides this, he rebelled against the steady habits enforced on him by a residence in his father's house, and a daily attendance at his father's bank ; yet he could no longer afford to live anywhere else in England. All this he confided to Fred ; but he did not confide to him that he had intentions and hopes of beginning his career in the new country by the help of a robbery in the old. He heard of Lady Ormond's wish to leave her

diamonds at the bank, and he laid his plans accordingly. The time of her doing so suited well enough with that of the departure of the *Aletheia*. It was possible that, in his double position of son and banker's clerk, he could gain possession of both jewels and money without difficulty ; but it was also possible that the presence of old Mr. Grimble, the cautious and trusted head-clerk, might prove exceedingly inconvenient ; hence his interest in that conversation about *hasheesh* at our party, and the fact that he actually did the next morning purchase a bottle of extract of hemp at the druggist's. Mr. Grimble, fortunately for him, escaped the dose that was intended for him, and the robbery was committed by the banker's son without any difficulty, nor did he find any difficulty afterwards in making all the circumstances connected with the theft appear in such a light that the evidence against the missing man was overwhelming.

He had, however, no intentions about Fred whatever, either when he robbed the bank or even when he went on board the *Aletheia*. He really intended to take the voyage himself, and his in-

itation to Fred to see him off arose only from a friendly feeling towards an irresistibly charming companion, and from the desire that some one should communicate with his father afterwards, and save him from the gnawing anxiety which subsequently he did not hesitate to inflict upon *me*, and which nearly cost me my life. It was by a mere chance he happened to have the extract of hemp in his pocket, and it was not till Fred slipped and fell on the companion-stairs that the diabolical plot presented itself for the first time to his mind. That very morning he had learned that the only woman he had ever cared for, Miss Fanny Gibbons, had been left a fortune sufficiently large to render exile from his own country, and a doubtful life of difficulty and adventure in a new one, unnecessary, if he could succeed in obtaining her pardon, and re-awakening an affection which he knew had once been very sincere. He went on board the *Aletheia* then, in an unhappy frame of mind, doubtful whether, after all, it would not have been better for him to remain at home; but the robbery had been committed, and he did not dare to return and face the sus-

pitions which would very probably fall upon *him*. His father believed he had gone to London, and would be absent for a few days. Under all these circumstances, he determined to relinquish any idea of winning Miss Gibbons, and setting up as a respectable man at home ; but he had never felt so desperate in himself, or had so much regretted that this chance of better things had come just too late, as at the moment when Fred, running gayly down the stairs to look at his cabin, caught his foot and fell ; and in that same moment the plot, in all its infamous completeness, flashed through his mind; and then took possession of it. It was a very easy plot to carry out. The only wonder was that any one should ever think of anything so wicked.

Fred was picked up and put in the berth, and a glass of whiskey offered him, and into that whiskey the extract of hemp was dropped by Mr. Fortescue in sufficient quantity to dull pain, and produce a heavy sleep that lasted some hours. He then assumed Fred's character of friend of the intending emigrant, told the steward that the poor young man had had a fall, hurt his leg, and

had better not be disturbed till morning, when the surgeon, who had not yet come on board, might pay him a visit, and see if his help was required.

The steward, and all in the ship, were far too busy in the hour of departure to have any spare humanity to bestow on a sick passenger, and Fred was left to himself till the vessel was miles on her road. Then he became feverish, and has a sadly confused recollection of anything that happened. He only knows that he was always wanting me and calling for me—my poor Fred!—and that the surgeon was always assuring him he had sent for me. When he recovered his senses sufficiently to know where he was, he found he was on board a ship days away from England; so all he could do was to wait, not patiently, but very impatiently, as he told me, till they passed a homeward bound vessel, when he took leave of the *Aletheia*, and came straight to Lynsford, without stopping anywhere on the road for half a second more than was actually necessary, and, once at Lynsford, he walked to Mrs. Crumpledum's, upstairs, and into my arms.

There is nothing more that need be added to this little history of the first few months of our happy married life, except that Mr. Jack Fortescue made a full confession of all that I have written above, and that, when he had sufficiently recovered from the effects of his accident, his father sent him out to Australia with a little capital, to try his hand on sheep-farming. His wicked behavior to Fred had brought him no good; for when he renewed his addresses to Miss Gibbons she refused to have anything to say to him. He had to hide Lady Ormond's diamonds while waiting for a safe opportunity to dispose of them, so they were returned intact; but the two hundred pounds he had stolen at the same time he squandered away without paying his debts. Neither did he ever give Fred back the twenty pounds he had lent him.

It certainly *is* the case, as far as *my* experience goes, that wicked people do *not* prosper even in this world, and that good people do. Mr. Fortescue was refused by Miss Gibbons, and then thrown from his horse, and very nearly killed; and this was all he gained by his bad behavior,

whilst every body really seemed as if they did not know how to make enough of Fred when his innocence was established. And as for me, they were so kind to me—I can't think why—but heaps of people called who had never been near us before, and one or two nice motherly old ladies kissed me the minute they saw me.

I found that Doctor Goldney had been telling everybody about my faith in Fred. Faith in Fred! Of course I had faith in him. I don't think I deserved much credit for *that*; but I suppose the interest all the world felt in him was reflected on me because I was his wife. If I was not the rose, I lived near it.

Mrs. Crumpledum was triumphant at having stood my friend throughout; and Fred presented her with a magnificent purple silk dress, which made me think that if he made many presents at that rate I should have to sell another watch and chain—if I had them.

"It's royal!" said Mrs. Crumpledum. "It didn't ought to be worn by any one under a Pope's wife—it didn't ought!"

As to Martha, she was so impressed by Fred's

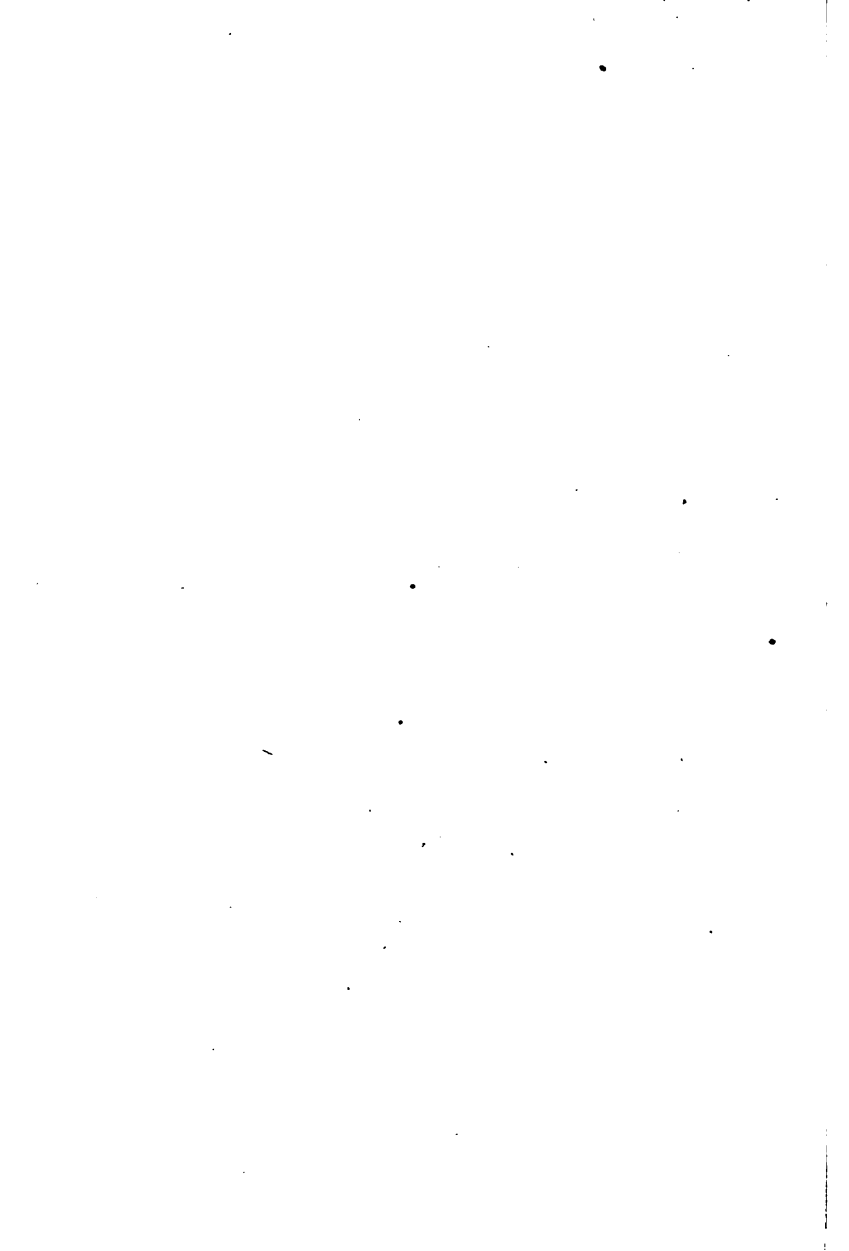
merits, and by the two facts that he had *not* voluntarily run away from me, while his return *had* been voluntary, that she actually consulted me about the answer she should make to an offer of marriage she had received from a neighboring butcher; and when I recommended her by all means to accept it, she grinned hideously, and said—"Magine me married!"

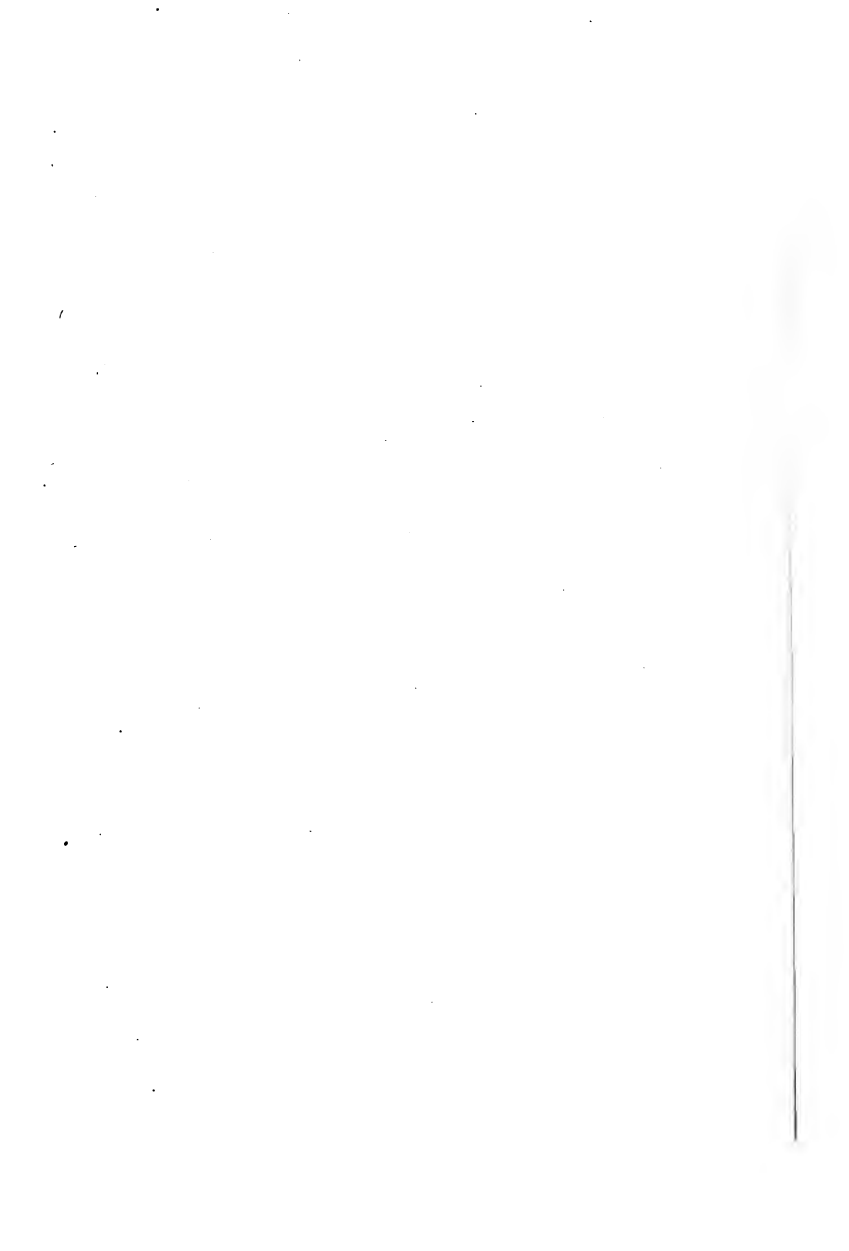
How happy Fred and I were, I have no words to express, but I really think we loved each other better, if that was possible, than we did before our trial. Fred said he had not a notion I had so much pluck in me, and that I was the best little wife a man ever had. Dear Fred! how I hope I shall always make him a good wife, and that he will always think as well of me as he does now!

We were very sorry for poor old Mr. Fortescue, and Fred went to him and offered to do anything possible to prevent his son's misconduct being made public, and declared that as long as Mr. Fortescue told people *he* was innocent, he did not the least wish that another word should be said about the matter. The poor old gentleman thanked him from his heart, and said that he had

a very good opinion of him, and was sure that he would do well, and that if he remained in the bank he would have an eye to his future interests.

However, Fred was not always a banker's clerk, though I think I have related enough of our history for the present.





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